Keepin' It Real: Negotiating Authenticity in the London Hip Hop Scene

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NEGOTIATING AUTHENTICITY IN THE LONDON HIP HOP SCENE

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Abstract

Despite growing academic attention on the highly valued ideal of authenticity in hip hop, little research has explored its particular role and significance in artists' everyday lives, in the UK as elsewhere. Using London as a case study, I explore how authenticity is understood, embodied, practised, and negotiated, in other words 'lived out', by rappers in a place where the music did not originate.

The research explores not just what 'being' real entails in this distinctive context of cultural production, but also how London rappers go about 'keeping' it real, against a confusing and rapidly changing cultural, technological and socio-economic environment. From hip hop's inception, a sense of struggle has been a feature of the culture, as well as motivation for artists to make their music. My research indicates that in the dynamic context of the London hip hop scene, influenced by the complex interrelated effects of capitalism, globalisation, migration and digitisation, there has been a shift in what artists are struggling against. The study reveals various strategic and tactical approaches that rappers engage in to negotiate the struggles they find in contemporary society whilst seeking to live out authenticity in the scene. These include radical individualism, universal commonality, oppositionist positioning, historical affiliation, stratified integration, explicit claims and media management.

Applying critical realism as an 'under-labouring' meta-theoretical foundation, in conjunction with ethnography, the study makes a contribution that moves beyond fixed and wholly socially constructed conceptualisations of authenticity. My research reveals that in the case of the London hip hop scene, authenticity is an emergent human capacity (re)produced and managed through the negotiation of the myriad tensions and struggles that hip hop artists living in London encounter. The study suggests that the struggles negotiated by rappers have much wider implications for young people living out their lives in contemporary society.

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CHAPTER 1

Keepin' It Real

> Hip hop is the voice of this generation. Even if you didn't grow up in the Bronx in the '70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together.
>
> Kool Herc (2005: xii)

1.1 Introduction

A girl handing me one of her Sony Walkman earphones and playing 'Just Don't Bite It' by Niggaz With Attitude (N.W.A) during a lunch break at school when I was 13, triggered my fascination and curiosity with hip-hop. This curiosity has stayed with me into adulthood as questions regarding how the rappers' experiences, communicated through the lyrics and the music, were able to disperse and proliferate from Compton in Los Angeles, across the Atlantic, to a rural town in the Midlands of England. How does music end up so divorced from its original context and become appropriated by various people, in different locales around the world? Can anyone 'do' hip hop, or do some people have more legitimacy than others? How is UK hip hop different from American rap? What does 'keepin' it real' actually mean? I have been grappling with these questions and my participation in the culture that pervaded my adolescence, as well as that of my peers, as I maintain my interest and involvement in hip hop into adulthood.

Since its emergence in the 1970s, hip hop has come to be one of the most ubiquitous and popular forms of music in contemporary culture, spreading far and wide across the world. As Osumare (2001: 171) states, "Global hip hop youth culture has become a phenomenon in the truest sense of the word and has affected nearly every country on

the map." The pervasiveness of hip hop and its predominance in our current cultural landscape is clearly visible in popular media outlets. For instance, Channel 4 aired a documentary in 2011 titled 'How Hip Hop Changed the World' and the *National Geographic* magazine produced a special feature in 2002 recognising hip hop as "the world's favourite youth culture" in which "just about every country on the planet seems to have developed its own rap scene."[1] The UK is no exception to this. A journalist described UK rap as "a broad sonic church, encompassing anything made in Britain by musicians informed or inspired by hip hop's possibilities."[2] London in particular, with its multi-ethnic population and migrant and diasporic influences, diverse culture, entrepreneurial spirit, and developed (formal and informal) networks for making and distributing music, make it a hotbed of cultural activity, which provides a fascinating case for the study of hip hop.

Hip hop has its roots in the 1970s in the Bronx ghetto of New York City but has grown to become a popular cultural form that has proliferated around the globe and is now a multi-billion pound industry. Originally a predominantly African-American art form, the music and its adjoining four cultural elements (DJing, MCing, Graffiti and Break-dancing), have been appropriated and developed in countries all over the world, ranging from France and Australia to Senegal and Japan (Mitchell, 2001). Capitalistic processes typical of late modernity and the postmodern era (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992) including neoliberal economics, globalisation, and immigration, have been instrumental in aiding the exportation and adoption of hip hop as a medium of youth affiliation around the world. Young people in the UK embraced hip hop culture in the

[1] Pryor, T. (2002). *Hip Hop: National Geographic World Music* http://worldmusic.nationalgeographic.co.uk/view/page.basic/genre/content.genre/hip_hop_730/en_US
[2] Batey, A. (2003). 'Home Grown: British Hip Hop' *The Times* http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/music/article2413721.ece

late 1970s, most notably in London where, according to Gidley (2007), diasporic youth found the malleable cultural resources of hip hop a meaningful form of identity exploration and expression in a predominantly white society. The expansion and spread of hip hop from a city neighbourhood to global phenomenon with its attendant commodification has been paralleled with debates concerned with its authenticity and legitimacy in its now more globalised form.

Hip hop has shifted from an underground culture that gave a voice to marginalised and disenfranchised youth to become a substantial global commercial industry. The music and culture is still often marketed with an empowering and emancipatory image, despite being co-opted by cultural and creative industries keen to capitalise on the associated style, music, technology and fashion, causing the authenticity of hip hop to come under intense scrutiny. In the early 1980s, documentaries such as *Beat Street* and *Wild Style* exported the creative elements of hip hop to elsewhere in America and abroad. Major music labels started to take an interest and wanted to sign up-and-coming artists. By the mid 1980s the cable music channel MTV was cashing in on hip hop and airing music videos. Political and socially conscious groups such as Public Enemy gave way to more fun and accessible party hip hop like the Beastie Boys who were catapulted to stardom and enjoyed mainstream success (Chang, 2006). Not only was hip hop transitioning from an underground to popular music but it was now no longer the sole preserve of African-Americans. White rapper Vanilla Ice was the first hip hop artist to top the Billboard charts with his song 'Ice Ice Baby' in 1990. However, he swiftly became subject to ridicule in the hip hop community as it emerged his record label had fabricated a poverty-stricken biography in which Vanilla Ice belonged to a street gang, when in reality he came from the suburbs of Dallas in Texas (Perry, 2004). This greatly tarnished his credibility and also had significant

repercussions for white rappers struggling to gain acceptance in hip hop communities all over the US (Hess, 2005). The contrived authenticity Vanilla Ice's record label had tried to promote incited debates between stakeholders in hip hop about race, oppression, class and commercialisation which are issues still fraught with tension today.

1.2 Key debates in global hip hop

The issue of race is hotly debated in hip hop literature, and is most often framed around black legitimacy and white illegitimacy (Harrison, 2008). Authors such as Dyson (2007) and Perry (2004) herald hip hop as the "best of blackness" and an expression of African-American identity. Others like Rose (1994) have noted that other communities and ethnicities were involved in the creative process of hip hop such as Puerto Ricans and Afro-Caribbeans, and that Kool Herc was in fact Jamaican. Commentators such as Bakwari Kitwana have been particularly vocal and outspoken in arguing the view that hip hop is purely an African-American art form. In his book *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: wankstas, wiggers, wannabes and the new reality of race in America* (2006), Kitwana argues that hip hop is not an amalgamation of different cultures but is black culture. He asserts "Those who suggest it isn't are confused, misled, trying to appropriate black youth culture or are too culturally arrogant to realize they are appropriating" (p.126). In response to claims such as these, black British scholar Paul Gilroy has critiqued Afro-centrism and other similar perspectives in his book *The Black Atlantic* (1993). He asks: "What is it about black America's writing elite which means they need to claim this diasporic cultural form in such an assertively nationalist way?"(p.34). The question highlights how a culture can

be imbued with considerable symbolic value and that debates within hip hop can be highly charged both inside and outside scholarly circles.

As hip hop originated around a culture of protest and freedom of expression for African-Americans and Latinos experiencing struggle in New York, many have questioned whether it could continue to embody its original essence in its increasingly marketised form. For scholars like McLeod (1999), hip hop's authenticity has been cast into doubt precisely because of it being appropriated by a dominant mainstream culture. Tate (2003) holds that hip hop should be used as a vehicle of social justice and that in its increasingly commodified form there is little room left for this role. Scholars like Patterson (1994) credit mass communication with diffusing hip hop around the world and creating a global hip hop scene. Yet Codrington (2007) argues that hip hop in the global context is often characterised as socially progressive in contrast to American hip-hop, which is seen as creatively diluted and highly commercialised. Others view global hip hop as mere imitations of American rap (Bynoe, 2002), in opposition to a growing body of scholars who acknowledge the African-American roots of hip hop but argue that the global significance of hip hop has gone beyond a simple identification with one originating culture (Mitchell, 2001; Alim et al., 2009). Various tensions between the global and local, as well as mainstream and commercial can be seen to stem from these debates.

The archetypal authentic rapper is defined by Harkness (2012: 288) as black, male, urban, underground, skilled and true to himself, indicating authenticity is rather 'rule bound'. The list suggests authenticity is fixed and static, but also raises the question of where these normative ideas come from; are they inherited, socially agreed upon, or different from place to place and person to person? The idea of following 'rules'

seems antithetical to the notion of authenticity and creative expression itself, so how do rappers negotiate the tension of being creative and authentic? Further problematic tensions particular to practitioners of hip hop include: Should rappers make music that reflects their own diverse musical interests, or instead that which closely aligns with the roots of hip hop? If rappers want to be famous and make money from their art, are they going against hip hop's values regarding 'not selling out'? Considering hip hop's origins in the Bronx ghetto of New York, do rappers have to be African-American and working-class to make rap music? In addition, there are less obvious questions such as can you continue rapping and making hip hop when you are in your 30s and beyond, or is it the preserve of the young? These issues relating to hip hop's history, culture, and values are intimately entwined with the authenticity of the rapper. The tension between what can be understood as 'hip hop authenticity' and 'rapper authenticity' is at the crux of debates on authenticity in rap music and its localised scenes.

Rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity, although closely entwined, refers to the tension between what can be understood as the self versus the community, in that rappers want to assert individuality *and* demonstrate belonging to a group. Hip hop authenticity then refers to how practitioners have to follow certain tropes, practices and rules based on the culture's history to gain acceptance by the collective, and yet, on the other hand, be highly individual and original, which can be understood as rapper authenticity. These debates will be further unpacked in the literature review. The contested nature of authenticity indicated by existing hip hop scholarship points to a need for an empirically driven analysis of how artists manage the various tensions on a day-to-day basis. To understand hip hop/rapper authenticity in a globalised and capitalistic world, my research offers a case study of London. The research explores

how authenticity is understood, discussed, embodied, assumed and actually lived out by participants of the London hip hop scene.

Most hip hop research to date has emerged from the USA with a shift in the last decade recognising hip hop as a global music, with Tony Mitchell's edited book *Global Noise* (2001) arguably signalling the emergence of a body of scholarly work on rap, known as global hip hop studies (Alim et al., 2009). Since then, studies of localised hip hop scenes have been carried out all over the world including Cuba (Geoffrey, 2005; Pacini- Hernández & Garofalo, 2000), South Africa (Warner, 2011), Brazil (Behague, 2006), France (Helenon, 2006), Japan (Condry, 2006), Australia (Morgan & Warren, 2001) and New Zealand (Mitchell, 2001). However, little research, especially involving empirical study, has been conducted in the UK. Research on music scenes in the UK has tended to focus on other music genres such as dance (Thornton, 1996), goth (Hodkinson, 2002) and bhangra (Huq, 2006) but not specifically hip hop, bar Bennett (2000) and Webb's (2007) studies on Newcastle and Bristol respectively. Bennett's study was ethnographic in nature and conducted for his PhD in the 1990s, making it rather outdated, but his contribution on issues such as race (due to Newcastle being predominantly white) are illuminating. Webb (2007) examined the local music 'milieu' within Bristol and their appropriation and adaptation of hip hop, which developed into a new genre labelled 'trip hop'. Although a valuable contribution to popular music in the UK, Webb's study was not based on empirical work and focused on trip hop[3], not specifically hip hop. However, previous research has been conducted on white appropriation of black cultures in London, for instance Hebdige's work on reggae (1987) and Alexander's (1996) research on black British youth identity. My research aims to fill the gap in global hip hop scholarship

[3] See Appendix A for Hip Hop Glossary of Terms.

by examining UK hip hop, specifically in the context of London and focusing on the contested nature of authenticity.

1.3 The focus of this study

Rapping, DJing, graffiti, and break-dancing (and an unofficial fifth element, that of knowledge or consciousness) comprise the multi-faceted culture of hip hop (Darby & Shelby, 2005). This thesis focuses on rap music, not the other elements of hip hop culture, although they are interlinked and influenced by each other. Therefore, in this thesis when I refer to 'hip hop', I am talking about hip hop music and not the other elements unless explicitly stated. For the purposes of this thesis, the terms rap music and hip hop are synonymous and used interchangeably, although I acknowledge that some scholars prefer to differentiate between them[4]. In addition, whilst aware that the term 'scene' is contested in certain literature[5], I am basing my usage on the definition provided by Stahl (2004: 54) as denoting the "formal and informal arrangement of industries, institutions, audiences and infrastructures" that underpin music-making.

Rappers and their relationship to hip hop as a cultural form, are the primary focus of this study. However, I shall still take into account DJs, fans and other participants involved in the musical element of hip hop as they all influence each other and understanding their inter-relationships is integral to the research. I focus exclusively on rappers and how they grapple with what it means to be authentic in cosmopolitan London, reviewing the conflicting social, cultural and economic tensions they manage

[4] For further reading on the hip hop/rap distinction see Alim et al. (2009).

[5] See Bennett (2004) for further discussion on 'scenes'. For an outline of key debates surrounding alternative terms such as subculture, neo-tribe and lifestyle, see Bennett & Kahn-Harris (2004); Hodkinson & Deike (2007); Hesmondhalgh (2005) and Muggleton (2003).

to ‘keep it real’. Ideally I would have liked to study in more detail all the interactions of the people who make up the scene, but I focused solely on the interactions of rappers with other scene members, as it is not within the scope of this PhD to examine the entire makeup of a music scene in a city the size of London. I have decided to focus on rappers because they are pivotal to the whole scene. Rappers are the most visible and identifiable agents of the music and it is their voice that gets heard.

Rapping can be understood as “a form of rhymed storytelling” (Rose, 1994: 2) that is “verbal art as performance” (Sköld & Rehn, 2007). This performed rhymed storytelling is manifested through the oral skills of the master of ceremonies, the ‘MC’ or ‘rapper’. The music which accompanies rapping in hip hop is referred to as ‘beats’. Beats are electronically composed, usually made through the manipulation of pre-existing material, for instance borrowing instrumental excerpts from other records (known as the ‘breakbeat’) or looping passages of music from different records to make a new track. Technology today allows ‘producers’, who usually start out as DJs before progressing to ‘produce’ their own tracks (Schloss, 2004), to create beats through samplers, drum machines, synthesisers and various computer software.[6] In the London hip hop scene, there are a few rappers who also produce their own beats, but generally rappers focus purely on the lyrics, which encompasses delivery, flow, wordplay and rhyme schemes. As my focus is on authenticity, I will largely concentrate on the everyday cultural and social lives of rappers. Although this of course encompasses music, I will not be taking on the wide-ranging literature on music (aesthetics, emotion, composition and so forth) beyond the scope of my study. It is through rappers’ stage personas, song lyrics, behaviours, interactions with others

[6] For a more in depth analysis on ‘beats’ and the musical composition of hip hop see Justin Williams’ book *Rhymin’ and Stealin’: Musical Borrowing in Hip Hop* (2013), Joseph Schloss’ *Making Beats* (2004) and chapter 7 in Mark Katz’s book *Capturing Sound* (2010).

and online presence, that one can investigate their explicit, as well as implicit, practices regarding authenticity. Furthermore, rappers are producing and performing hip hop culture (as opposed to merely consuming it), and it would be reasonable to suggest that, as such, they are central to reinforcing, subverting and/or transforming this cultural form through their (in)authentic practices. For rappers there is arguably more at stake, compared to other practitioners in the scene, as their reputations and livelihoods depend on 'keepin' it real'.

London offers a particularly compelling case study to explore localised hip hop because of the unique position it enjoys as a cultural melting pot and cosmopolitan hub of culture and music. The strong migrant and diasporic population, as indicated by the 2011 census report, states one in three Londoners were born in a foreign country[7], making it one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world. Wood (2009) suggests that the particular experimental and remix practices, both aesthetically and politically, that are central to hip hop means the culture provides various malleable and hybrid forms of raw material for young people to exploit for creative identity expression. Being English speaking, the UK, and London in particular, was one of the first places to adopt hip hop in the late 1970s (Hebdige, 1987). London being deemed "a middle-class city" due to the changing industrial structure, work patterns and leisure habits since the 1960s and 1970s (Butler, 2003) has significance for a music culture where authenticity is related to working-class struggle and hardship (Hess, 2005). Despite a growing body of research on global hip hop, with studies of localised scenes being carried out all over the world, London is noticeably absent. Hip hop in London, and the UK more generally, is lacking scholarly and critical attention which has the effect of silencing the creative and cultural agents who

[7] Office for National Statistics Census 2012 http://www.ons.gov.uk/

comprise the scene. Therefore, valuable contributions to debates in hip hop, and in my case wider issues concerning the role of authenticity in cultural practice, have not materialised, to the detriment of UK hip hop scholarship. This study aims to fill that gap.

The research is timely for various reasons. Firstly, as it has not been researched before, it makes a contribution to hip hop studies. Secondly, following the 2011 riots in London, it is arguable that perceptions of hip hop (in this area as elsewhere) need to be somewhat qualified. In the aftermath of the riots, headlines in mainstream newspapers appeared such as, 'London riots: is rap music to blame for encouraging this culture of violence?' (Daily Mirror, August 2011), 'David Starkey: Gangsta culture is a poison spreading among youths of all races' (Daily Mail, August 2011), and 'Rap responds to the riots: 'They have to take us seriously'' (The Guardian, August 2011). This type of moral panic generated by the media (Cohen, 1972) requires an empirically driven study to examine whether gangster and violent culture do indeed underpin rap culture and constitute authentic hip hop. Lastly, the notion of authenticity as a cultural phenomenon is enjoying widespread popular appeal, ranging from self-help guides such as *The Power of Authenticity to Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Robbins, 2009), to food and drink branding itself as 'the real thing'. It could be argued that in these times of late capitalist production, individualism and high consumption, a feeling of increasing inauthenticity and alienation pervades, making authenticity a worthwhile preoccupation and focus.

The purpose of this study is to examine authenticity in the London hip hop scene: what is it, why is it important, and how is it maintained in a creative context characterised by the tendency towards change? The study will also examine whether

'hip hop authenticity' and 'rapper authenticity' are universal and fixed or situated and transitory. The phrase 'keepin' it real' in itself raises significant questions regarding what 'real' is. Also, the emphasis on 'keepin' suggests maintenance and effort, which are arguably grounds for *in*authenticity. The primary questions guiding this research are:

How do rappers 'live out' authenticity in the London hip hop scene? What does this tell us about:

i) what authenticity is?
ii) the changing context of the London hip hop scene?
iii) the challenges facing young people in contemporary society as they seek to live out authenticity?

It is through 'living out', i.e. discussing, understanding, embodying, negotiating and managing, that authenticity can be revealed, and also the changing context of everyday life for rappers. 'Everyday life', as Bennett (2005: 2) argues, is a mediator between the individual agent and social structure, so studying rappers in the London scene can help us to understand structural processes and agency. In this way, the research can shed light on what might be forces preventing rappers from 'keepin' it real' and how they negotiate these challenges. In late modernity, conceptions of identity, based around class, race, gender and occupation are breaking down (Bauman, 2000). However, as the debates in the literature indicate, these are central facets of authenticity in hip hop, which makes studying the lived experience of these forces while striving to 'keep it real' pertinent and worthwhile. By researching a hip hop scene in London, the findings hold potential in informing us more generally about life

in contemporary society for young people, the challenges they might face, and how to manage them.

The data generated from this study will respond to existing research that suggests authenticity is generally either essentialist in nature (Taylor, 1997) or socially constructed (Moore, 2002). Uncovering how this authenticity is lived out on a day-to-day basis requires an appropriate methodology capable of capturing and observing the embodied as well as performed nature of being an authentic rapper. In addition to the 'living out' of authenticity on the part of the rapper, the contemporary context of London and the hip hop scene will need to be considered in order to situate the agents in an evolving globalised and capitalist city. Fundamentally, the research seeks to understand what it means to 'keep it real' in the complex, chaotic world we live in. This question is important because of the considerable symbolic value attached to authenticity in the hip hop community and the strong emotional investment rappers pour into keeping it real. There is much at stake for rappers who are considered *in*authentic as loss of respect and a tarnished reputation have repercussions for sales and thus livelihood.

In summary, the research has two overarching aims. The first is to ascertain the nature of authenticity on an ontological level in a changing context. The second aim is to understand how authenticity in the London hip hop scene might be productive in telling us what is constraining and enabling young people more broadly in contemporary society.

Based on the insight generated from my data, achieved through the particular approach of combining a critical realist theoretical framework with ethnography, I

hope to make three contributions to knowledge. Firstly, a case study that illuminates what constitutes authenticity in a localised global music culture. Although authenticity has been an area of concern in popular music studies, and to an extent the study of hip hop, less is known about *how* authenticity is lived out on a day-to-day basis. By using ethnographic research methods, this study takes into account the verbal and non-verbal behaviour and practices of participants rather than purely discursive claims to authenticity (Peterson, 1997), thus incorporating what people *do* as well as say. Secondly, a contribution on a theoretical level that moves beyond binary debates of authenticity being either essentialist or constructed (Grossberg, 1996), is attempted through the implementation of a critical realist theoretical framework that re-conceptualises authenticity as an emergent and changing human capacity, concretely contextualised within a geo-historically specific 'glocal' culture. Thirdly, I contribute empirically grounded research on the London hip hop scene that has hitherto evaded detailed scrutiny. This fills a gap in the growing canon of global hip hop studies that focuses on hip hop outside the USA.

My research has implications for stakeholders in the London scene and UK hip hop more broadly, namely rappers, aspiring rappers, fans, and other participants wanting to get into the scene. The research sheds light on the contradictions apparent in hip hop culture, for instance making music according to 'rules' but also wanting to innovate and experiment with personal expression. In addition, the emphasis on its history and origins while it continually evolves and alters. Also, the tension between American hip hop and its more localised forms, and importantly, *how* scene participants attempt to reconcile these through various 'strategies'. Other artists and workers in the creative industries might find the research helpful too because of similar contradictory pressures in making art but needing to earn a living. The

empirical data also holds wider implications for contemporary youth culture more generally, through rendering visible the social, cultural, political and economic conditions that enable and constrain young people in London today. In addition, my research will be relevant to researchers looking at hip hop, identity politics, and authenticity as my thesis builds on existing research in these areas.

1.4 Overview of hip hop in the UK

Before progressing further, it is helpful to place the scene under question in its historical and cultural context. American hip hop was exported to the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although the origins of hip hop in New York are extremely well documented, there is still no formal history or recording of the early scene in the UK apart from varying personal accounts of participants at the time. The Sugarhill Gang record 'Rappers Delight' reached number three in the UK singles chart in 1979, to significant critical acclaim, which garnered listeners and fans. Hip hop also seeped into England through various other channels including national radio shows, local pirate stations and mixtapes from New York, as well as imported 12 inch vinyl from independent record labels (Webb, 2007). When the American hip hop films *Wild Style* (1983) and the graffiti documentary *Beat Street* (1984) reached Britain, the culture really germinated and became popular in underground music circles. Similarly to the US, the beginning of UK hip hop was largely based on live shows and parties, with little thought of what was evolving.[8]

The historical, social and economic elements that produced hip hop, in addition to the multiple musical influences such as reggae, soul, blues, jazz, funk and spoken word,

[8] Low, P. (2003) 'UK Hip Hop: The Story' http://ukhiphop.tripod.com/ (accessed 18/10/10)

means that hip hop provided various malleable and hybrid forms of raw materials to work with, allowing transmission, absorption and transformation within very different sites (Wood, 2009). The cultural resources that hip hop offered were attractive to a new generation of diasporic youth who were seeking a sense of identity and representation in London. Many of the migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s had colonial ties or came through labour recruitment agreements and wanted to enjoy the post-war economic boom (Geddes, 2003). Hip hop grew and developed with the burgeoning multi-ethnic youthful population in London. The city offered various networks for making and distributing music both in formal ways such as the music industry, but also informally, through DIY channels such as pirate radio, home-made mix tapes and specialist record shops (Huq, 2007). From the early 1980s, hip hop in Britain was a cross-racial scene. Unlike cities like New York, various ethnic groups in London tended not to live in segregated neighbourhoods meaning there were opportunities for cultural exchange between white, Caribbean, African and Asian youth.

British youth were early adopters of US hip hop, basing their cultural practices on American models by enthusiastically importing African-American attitudes, style and music. As Hesmondhalgh and Melville observe, "almost as soon as it moved from the street corner to the recording studio, hip hop, along with rap, found a sympathetic audience in the United Kingdom" (2001: 90). Hip hop acts began to emerge in London in the mid-1980s, mostly concentrated in multiracial and creative pockets of cultural activity, such as Brixton, Ladbroke Grove and Peckham. Groups and artists to surface during the 1980s include London Posse, Cookie Crew and Monie Love,

Sindecut, DJ Newtrament, and Ruthless Rap Assassins.[9] Although hip hop in the UK started out very much as a 'borrowed culture', with British artists imitating their American counterparts, it rapidly developed its own distinctive variations. Through inscribing their own meaning, musical influences and local reference points into the music, artists sought to make hip hop their own means of authentic expression and thus not solely derivative of US rap (Bennett, 2000).

Hemondhalgh & Melville (2001) outline the challenges facing artists in UK hip hop's nascent stage concerning the extent to which US rap should serve as a model:

> This issue was two-fold: a question of accent (style) and one of content. Should a British rapper adopt the U.S. drawl of the Brooklyn badboys (an enterprise doomed to failure) or stick to an English accent that might sound strange? Should a U.K. rapper adopt the Uzi- packing, carjacking, bitch-smacking lexicon of U.S. rap or develop a 'vocab' more in step with the British context, where guns are rare, few youths can afford cars, misogyny is perhaps slightly less acceptable, and the prevailing British diffidence renders public boasting (or 'bigging yourself up') relatively uncommon and frowned upon? (2001: 91)

These questions characterise the aforementioned tension between 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity' as artists had to negotiate the extent to which they individualise rap to make it their own, yet keep it recognisable as hip hop. While many rappers could not help but begin rapping in the styles and accents of their favourite American artists, others realised that to successfully communicate to a British audience, they would need to use their own voice. The early hip hop scene in the UK was ridiculed because of artists mimicking US rappers and adopting their accents. Conversely, Wood (2009) suggests the 1980s were a period of intense creativity and innovation in UK hip hop, though largely undocumented. It is crucial to

[9] These UK hip hop artists are not an exhaustive list of who was performing at the time but a selection of the more well-known artists. For more information on how hip hop started in the UK, see the personal account of http://ukhiphop.tripod.com/ as the early days of hip hop in Britain is still not well documented or recorded elsewhere.

acknowledge this when positioning black British culture in the authenticity debate, as it opposes the view British artists simply imitated American hip hop.

A potential reason for this lack of recognition was that mainstream media and record companies were slow to respond to localised hip hop in the UK. Neate (2004) suggests it was precisely the constant comparison with US rap that made it difficult for British rappers to break though: "Rapping in the same language as their American counterparts and, frequently, about similar subject matter, they've struggled to secure industry support. [...] [W]hy would a record company back local products that immediately attract [...] comparison" (2004: 8). In response, the UK scene developed through highly localized scenes in urban areas, sites of both creativity and consumption based largely on live shows and parties because no early UK hip hop was recorded on vinyl. The scene bolstered support through the exchange of mixtapes, videos, live performance, fanzines, and pirate radio (Wood, 2009). London Posse, one of the most popular and high-profile rap acts in the 1980s, recorded on four different labels in four years, indicating the instability of the UK scene at that time and how major record companies were unable to comprehend and market the underground cultural phenomenon (Wood, 2009). Arguably, this lack of interest in hip hop by the music industry and media is what let the scene flourish and develop its own original sound because it was untainted by corporate money and was protected and unauthorised for a period of time until it became more commercial (Wood, 2009). UK hip hop's lack of mainstream success, partly due to being widely considered a passing fad or a novelty, meant that in order to survive, hip hop artists were entrepreneurial with a strong DIY (do-it-yourself) mentality (Wood, 2009). As well as the creative processes of song writing, recording and performance, artists had to self-promote, self-publish and self-release (Oliver, 2010). This was achieved through making mix

tapes, handing out flyers, or in the case of artist Mark B, selling tapes and then CDs out of a bag or the boot of his car. More recently, the role of information technology and media has had a huge influence on DIY culture within music scenes, impacting the way people create, produce and distribute music, and how participants interact with each other (Kruse, 2010).

As hip hop has spread and become popular across the UK since the 1980s to the present day, the music has been increasingly modified to reflect the people and place of where it is adopted, creating pockets of regional hip hop, very distinct from the initial imitations of American hip hop. For instance in Bristol in the 1980s, Webb (2007) argues that the mix of communities in the city seemed to encourage experimentation and mixing rather than a rigid adherence to a particular style, or a music that reflected American influences. The particular blend of hip hop that became popular in Bristol and later nationally, was known as 'trip-hop' and after a brief underground period, became significantly commercially successful. Trip hop is still popular today, although is considered more 'mainstream' compared to its underground and specialist sound in the 1980s (Webb, 2007). The genre labelled 'grime' is often considered a distinctly British adaptation and transformation of hip hop that emerged during the 2000s (Gidley, 2007). Grime, which hails from East London, is comprised of an amalgamation of influences ranging from UK garage to dancehall and hip hop, and features MCs rapping (Dedman, 2011). The success of grime has often overshadowed the music of UK hip hop artists, despite the two genres being connected. In 2011, grime crossed over into mainstream popular music in Britain with a string of top ten hits in the singles chart by artists such as Wretch 32, Lethal B and Chipmunk. Grime music offers another example of hip hop being adapted and modified by creative agents in localised scenes.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

This introductory chapter provides the context of the thesis by indicating why the topic area is of interest and reveals a gap in research on UK hip hop and authenticity. I also show how the area of authenticity and global hip hop are considerably contested through outlining key debates, particularly between that of 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity'. I discuss my research questions and overall objectives of the study, including the intended contribution of the research and who might benefit from it. I finally ended with an overview of the London hip hop scene by providing an account of UK hip hop to place the study in its broader context.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I examine what has already been written on authenticity in culture, popular music, and hip hop. Based on American hip hop, global hip hop studies and the little research on UK hip hop, I draw out key issues concerning race, class, appropriation and commercialisation. In Chapter 3, I discuss the critical realist theoretical underpinnings of the study and how it is most suited to answering the research question of understanding what authenticity is. Though social constructionism is important in explaining authenticity because of its discursive and co-produced facets, I suggest it is not the whole story, as the world exists independently of one's observation of it. Continuing the discussion of methodology, I justify ethnography as the most appropriate method for this type of enquiry. Chapter 4 maps out the changing context of the London hip hop scene, and the ongoing effects of the macro-processes of migration, globalisation, capitalism, and digitisation. Following on from the previous chapter, in Chapter 5 I outline the struggles facing rappers in an unstable and changing environment by identifying key

tensions: innovation versus convention; black versus white; working-class versus middle-class, rapper versus self; underground versus mainstream; young versus old; and faker versus real. In Chapter 6, I explain how rappers go about negotiating these tensions whilst striving to 'keep it real' by delineating their strategic approaches. These 'strategies' and 'tactics' are categorised as radical individualism, universal commonality, oppositionist positioning, explicit claims, media management, historical affiliation, and stratified integration. Lastly, Chapter 7 reiterates the main argument that authenticity can be conceptualised as a dialectical and emergent human capacity, produced and managed through the negotiation of tensions experienced in everyday life. Following on from this discussion of the particular tensions negotiated in the context of the London hip hop scene I conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of the study, suggesting avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

> The process that is hip-hop is not proprietary to the Bronx, New York City, the East Coast, or the United States and the Caribbean for that matter, which is why in every place in the world where hip hop is relevant there's an accompanying narrative about authentic beginnings in that part of the world. The point is that hip hop has never been as "real" as we've been led to believe.
>
> Mark Anthony Neal (2012: 69)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter surveys literature on authenticity in culture, popular music and hip hop. The review firstly examines authenticity in cultural theory, exploring dominant theories conceptualising authenticity as either socially constructed or essentialist in nature. I then look at authenticity in popular music, focusing on Peterson's (1997) notion of 'authenticity work' in particular. Authenticity in hip hop is investigated next, highlighting debates about what constitutes 'keepin' it real' and the various approaches scholars have used in their studies. Notable tensions in the literature include whether authenticity is fixed or fluid, debates on race, and also issues concerning appropriation and commercialisation. The themes are examined through a survey of literature on US hip hop, global hip hop and the little research conducted on UK hip hop. By reviewing the literature in this chapter, I show how contested and contentious authenticity is in both hip hop and popular music studies in that there is little agreement over what it is or, indeed, whether it even exists. I also contend that a crucial tension I frame in terms of 'rapper authenticity' versus 'hip hop authenticity' underpins much of the debates in hip hop literature.

2.2 What is authenticity?

Authenticity has come to occupy a central role in contemporary Western society and has thus become a contested site of scholarly attention in disciplines ranging from philosophy, sociology, and anthropology to aesthetics, music and cultural studies. Topics of investigation reveal the reach of authenticity in contemporary culture, including work (Fleming, 2009), politics (Krug, 2009), reality TV (Dubrofsky, 2007), cosmetic surgery (Heyes, 2007), salsa music (Urquia, 2004; Waxer, 2002), cuisine (Pang, 2003), furniture (Orvell, 1989), wine (Beverland, 2005), ethics (Varga, 2012) and popular music (Grazian, 2003; McLeod, 1999; Peterson, 1997; Fox, 1987), to name but a few. How authenticity has been conceptualised, though, varies between different schools of thought. Academic scholarship on authenticity can roughly be divided into two camps. The first hold there is an "essential(ised), real, actual, essence" (Taylor, 1997: 21) whereby people can speak the truth of their situation, culture and experience. The other camp argue authenticity is not inherent in a person, object, event, or performance but a socially agreed upon construct (Peterson, 1997; Grazian, 2004; Harrison, 2008). In the words of Moore (2002: 210), "It is ascribed, not inscribed." In contrast to these theories, I position myself with Frith (1994) who suggests values in music such as authenticity are not socially agreed upon constructs but produced through cultural activity, i.e. through 'living them out'.

In a bid to understand and tame authenticity, many cultural and music theorists have attempted to break it down into manageable chunks, often producing a tripartite conception. For instance, Moore (2002) proposes three authenticities: authenticity of expression, authenticity of execution, and authenticity of experience. *Authenticity of expression*, or 'first person authenticity', is when an artist speaks the truth of their

own situation, giving an audience the impression that the communication is unmediated in some way. However, as Moore notes 'unmediated expression' is problematic as it assumes the possibility of emotional content "untrammelled by the difficulties attendant on the encoding of meaning in verbal discourse" (2002: 212). Moore gets around this by suggesting that what is important is whether the artist can *convey* to his or her audience they are perceiving real emotion. Similar notions of unmediated expression have been suggested by Taylor (1997: 26) who talks about *authenticity as primality*, whereby an expression is perceived to be authentic if it can be traced to an initiatory instance, whereas Grossberg (1992) calls it *honesty to experience*.

Authenticity of execution or 'third person authenticity' is when an artist speaks the truth of absent others, embedded within a tradition of performance. *Authenticity of experience* or 'second person authenticity' is when a performance succeeds in speaking the truth of the listener's culture, where the music 'tells it like it is' for the listener (2002: 220). Moore argues for a shift from consideration of the intention of various originators towards the perception of the audience and the reasons they may have for finding, or failing to find, a particular performance authentic. Although Moore states at the beginning of his article that authenticity is not inherent in a person or piece of music, the authenticities he presents are rather essentialist in nature. Furthermore, the three authenticities overlap substantially as expression and execution are not clearly distinguishable.

In *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity* (1995), Fornäs provides a typology of authenticity classified as social authenticity, subjective authenticity and meta-authenticity. *Social authenticity* refers to a judgment of genuineness based on the

norms of a certain social community. *Subjective authenticity* is validated by the individual. *Meta authenticity* authenticates the author by deriving legitimacy from the level of symbolic expression itself. This validates 'synthetic' texts through the evidenced meta-reflexivity of their authors. Fornäs (1995: 275) holds that authenticity is not directly opposed to artificiality since it is socially constructed based on what we perceive. The tripartite model can be applied to different cultural texts, including hip hop. Social authenticity appears extremely important in hip hop, for example, as authenticity is validated by one's peers in the community and a shared mutual understanding of what counts as authentic.

In Howard Becker's research on art worlds, he explains the way artists and their art are valued in conjunction with one another: "'Artists' reputations are a sum of the values we assign to the works they have produced… the reputation of the artist and the work reinforce one another: we value more a work done by an artist we respect, just as we respect more an artist whose work we have admired" (1982: 23). Becker illustrates the extent to which ostensibly objective aesthetic judgments are subjective, socially constructed, and based on connections between the artist and consumer. An individual consciously and unconsciously engages in complex cultural practices when interpreting a cultural text. In music as well as visual art, how one feels about the artist impacts the interpretation of the cultural product and vice versa. In hip hop, rarely is a rapper or hip hop musical work considered in isolation, they are interpreted together. Thus for a rapper, lived out authenticity is of vital importance because one's lyrics and music has to reflect one's life.

The definition of authenticity in a living art form can have a number of meanings, Peterson avers, but what is important centers on being *believable* and at the same time

original (1997: 220 italics in original). Therefore the claim of authenticity made by or for a person, thing or performance has to be either accepted or rejected by relevant others. This is called the process of authentication. It calls attention to the importance of not just the intention of those wanting to be authentic, but how others receive and perceive them, which is a highly subjective affair. Moore (2002) holds that whether or not a performance or person is regarded as authentic, depends on who 'we' are. The listener or viewer interpret the cultural text, be it music, art or literature based on their individual cultural background, life experiences and taste. Bourdieu argues in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) that taste or consumer preferences are not innate, intellectual choices but rather socially conditioned. The object of consumer choice reflects a symbolic hierarchy that is determined and maintained by upper classes to enforce distance or distinction from lower groups in society, thus act as forms of social positioning. Peterson (2005) found in his research on country music, quite often the 'experts' and fans had quite different judgments of authenticity. Other factors have an influence on the authentication, such as the passage of time, because of a simplification and reimagining of the past based on memories. Furthermore, there are various gatekeepers of visible history, ranging from critics, historians and teachers to documentary makers and music specialists, who all have a voice in authentication (Peterson, 2005). Although authentication would appear to be a key part of authenticity as it allows an understanding of how it is claimed in differing temporal and spatial contexts, I will not be including the judgement process in my study. This thesis focuses on the level of the rapper and the way in which they understand, negotiate and embody authenticity, in other words the question of what authenticity actually is and how it is lived out. As such, the reception of authenticity by fans, critics, historians and so on remains largely beyond the remit of this study.

All these theories offer valuable ideas on authenticity but none of them quite capture the complexity, depth and changing nature of authenticity in a contemporary music scene. The self and social categories might represent an advantageous lens to approach authenticity, as together they capture a key tension between the rapper as an individual, and their belonging to a community. However the theories expounded in this area are limited in explaining how authenticity is understood and actually lived out in a scene at a micro level. Peterson (1997; 2005) provides a more comprehensive and detailed account of authenticity, through his theory of 'authenticity work', which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Although his research focuses on country music, many aspects would seem to be applicable to hip hop.

2.3 Authenticity in popular music studies

Research on authenticity in youth (sub)cultures focuses heavily on style and stylistic preference. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham pioneered the notion that spectacular subcultures (indicated by the detail of clothes and their cultural forms) such as mods, skinheads and teds were collective responses by working-class youth to structural changes in post-war society (Bennett, 2004). These groups, along with modern subcultures such as Goths, skaters, and clubbers, have particular values and ideologies based on identification and distinction. The subcultures mostly claim authenticity either discursively through the disavowal of commericalised dominant culture, or in exhibiting cultural distinctiveness and discerning taste through their appearance (Hodkinson, 2012). Hebdige's (1979) semiological analysis of punks looked at their material qualities, and argued, "subculture is concerned first and foremost with consumption. It operates exclusively in the leisure sphere… It communicates through commodities" (p.90). The emphasis

on style can be read as homology as it infers an inherent coherence between the style, behaviour and identities of participants (Willis, 1978). As Hodkinson (2012: 561) explains, "Homology suggests nothing is accidental, random or coincidental – each element of the style is there for a reason and each contributes to a distinctive and coherent overall meaning." This reduces subcultures to material culture, consumption and conformity, rather than the larger life project that might motivate individual participation.

In her study on UK club culture, Thornton (1996) conceptualised authenticity as a social construction that possesses no inherent qualities. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1984) work on cultural and social capital and Becker's (1963) concept of 'hipness', Thornton coined the term 'subcultural capital' to denote the power relations at play in subcultures. The subcultural capital perspective suggests social groups are not hierarchical but instead operate in highly complex multi-dimensional spaces. Subcultural capital connotes 'hipness' which can be either objectified, in terms of being externally tangible and recognisable, or embodied, that it is say possessed by someone innately. Subcultural capital imbues status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder and includes such things as being 'in the know', wearing the right clothing and using current slang, yet not over using it either, as nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard (Thornton, 1996). This highlights a recurring contradiction in authenticity, in that one exerts effort in seeking authenticity yet at the same time cannot be perceived as 'trying too hard' as this epitomises *in*authenticity. While theoretically rich, Thornton's study made little attempt to locate the quest for authenticity within the context of larger macro-social processes occurring in late modernity that may have brought about and influenced these authenticating practices. Following Lewin & Williams (2009: 66), it is possible

the ideology of authenticity serves as something more than social status to young people.

Grazian's (2004) empirical research based on the Chicago Blues scene, argues authenticity was a fabrication and invention produced by social imagining and collective myth-making. Rather than authenticity being an objective quality that exists in time and space, Grazian holds that authenticity, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. It is therefore rarely a material thing, but what members of a particular social milieu imagine the symbols of authenticity to be. He therefore suggests there exists a 'symbolic economy of authenticity' where participants in the Blues scene invest in signs and places that have symbolic value. In music that becomes increasingly commoditised, consumers look even more vigilantly for signs of authenticity which is what Grazian believes has happened to hip hop. He argues the desire to 'keep it real' in hip hop is a quest that will unlikely ever come to a satisfying resolution as it will never be within reach.

Peterson's research on country music, most notably his book *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (1997), is arguably the most extensive study of authenticity in popular music. Based on archival research on country music and the production of culture perspective, Peterson focuses on the process of institutionalization to demonstrate the ways in which authenticity is fabricated in country music. Peterson argues that authenticity is socially constructed as the continual quest for a 'creative voice' has the effect of destabilising the image of the authentic, so that the idea of authenticity continually evolves. As such, what is taken to be authentic is not static but continually generated over the years (1997: 220). In the case of hip hop, we can apply this argument to suggest authenticity is an emergent capacity, which changes

according to different actors and context. Thus the different countries and locales where hip hop is being adopted and practiced will have variations on what constitutes hip hop (Wermuth, 2001; Bennett, 2000).

Although Peterson's conceptualisation of authenticity in country music can be usefully applied to UK hip hop, there are several points on which I would depart from his theory and approach. For example, Peterson maintains authenticity is top-down in the sense that the music industry ultimately determines what is authentic. Even though decisions are supposedly made to satisfy fan tastes, in practice they are made largely to satisfy gatekeepers (Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Ryan, 1983). Although authenticity can, and is, used to sell UK hip hop music, it is arguably not the primary motive behind rappers' attitudes and behaviours as it is more to do with personal and collective identity. Furthermore, authenticity in UK hip hop does not appear a top down phenomenon with executive gate keepers deciding what is authentic, it seems bottom up in the underground scene in which rappers are key agents rather than music industry executives. This could perhaps explain why it is not very commercially sellable music and why major record labels are not interested in UK hip hop. The music is mostly consumed via downloads from sites like Bandcamp and SoundCloud and buying CDs at the end of gigs. The scene is largely independent and DIY, especially with artists setting up their own labels. For instance, the rapper Fliptrix was CEO of High Focus Records at the age of 21.

Peterson's study was based on archival research because he was looking at the history of country music from the 1920s to the 1990s. Peterson did not talk to artists and fans to hear their own views on authenticity and he made his analysis of key artists like Hank Williams through secondary sources. However, he does acknowledge a radio

disk jockey as a key informant in a later article (Peterson, 2005). By adopting a research angle looking at industry and institutionalization, Peterson's approach is functionalist through focusing on how structures shape music, culture and society. In taking such an approach, the agency of the actors involved is potentially diminished, or worse, not taken into account at all. An alternative perspective would be to explore authenticity at a micro-level that looks at interactions of key agents in a music scene. The best way to achieve this might be through talking directly to participants, documenting their activities, and observing their relationships and interactions with others. Research conducted at a micro-level is still able to make connections to broader social process and macro perspectives as industry and societal structures will have to be considered in order to understand the interactions of individual agents in a scene.

In focusing on the socially constructed nature of authenticity, Peterson draws attention to the conscious effort required to both achieve and maintain it. Such 'authenticity work' can take a number of forms. In his article *In Search of Authenticity* (2005), Peterson delineates six forms of authenticity work: authenticity through ethnic/cultural identity; the elasticity of group membership; authenticity through status identity; seeking authentic experience; technologically mediated authenticity; and authenticity to constructed self. The framework of 'authenticity work' highlights a potential paradox, in that in engaging in authenticity work, one would appear to be inherently *in*-authentic, conforming and not being true to oneself. In hip hop, even though there is an emphasis on 'being true to yourself', suggesting authenticity is a personal phenomenon, the rapper performs various forms of authenticity work to gain approval from others. It raises the question of the extent to which a rapper's desire for authenticity is for him/herself, or for social validation among peers, or for acceptance

from fans through perpetuating a particular view of what hip hop is. The way in which rappers have to negotiate the tension between individual expression and community practices highlights the tension between 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity'. Perry (2004: 88) argues "hip hop concerns itself with the self and the we. Its consciousness is both the ego and the collective". Thus authenticity is arguably constituted through a blend of the self *and* other.

Lived out authenticity

In his essay *Music and Identity*, Simon Frith argues against the idea that popular music somehow 'reflect(s)' or 'represent(s)' the people. His argument is a stance against homology, a view of the structural relationships between material and musical forms (1996: 108). He suggests that popular music *produces* rather than reflects social groups. His argument rests on two premises, "first, that identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being; second, that our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*" (1996: 109). If we apply this to UK hip hop, authenticity can be understood as emergent and based on group practices, rather than a socially agreed upon construct. Frith goes on to say,

> What I want to suggest in other words, is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities (the assumption of the homology models) but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them (1996: 111).

This perspective is in contrast to subcultural literature which holds participants choose a particular style and display belonging through the consumption of cultural

commodities (Hebdige, 1979). The notion of 'living' out ideas, rather than merely expressing them, as articulated by Frith, suggests a connection to wider society as cultural activity does not exist in a vacuum. Identity exploration and the pursuit of authenticity may then be a response to societal shifts, which points to a need in locating artists and scenes within their wider social contexts (Taylor, 1991). Lewin and Williams (2009) found in their study on punks, participants enacted their subjectively realised belief systems through praxis in everyday life, for example, in the rejection of consumerism. Punks drew a sharp distinction between being and doing; they expressed disdain for people who engaged in artificial performances in order to gain social approval (2009: 73). For participants in music scenes, the quest to live out authenticity is not about social status but self-realisation and wanting to lead meaningful lives.

2.4 Authenticity in hip hop

Scholars have developed varying conceptualisations of authenticity in hip hop, though they are mostly based on US rap. One of the most cited articles by McLeod (1999) argues that authenticity became an issue for hip hop when it was threatened with assimilation into a mainstream dominant culture; artists therefore made authenticity claims in a bid to preserve their individual status and hip hop's identity. As Moore (2002) has noted, authenticity is often only discussed in contexts where it is felt to be absent or has been called into question. McLeod's study is one of the most cited because there are so few studies that try to provide an all-encompassing typology of hip hop authenticity. His research involved talking to high-profile American rappers and analysing lyrics and magazine articles through discourse analysis. However, McLeod only looked for the words 'true', 'real' and 'authentic' which arguably limits

the analysis to a very narrow conceptualisation of authenticity. Furthermore, authenticity in hip hop is not purely discursive; it can be embodied and practiced too, by living a particular lifestyle, according to one's racial and socio-economic background, and so on. In addition, the 23 artists McLeod interviewed (from members of Cypress Hill and the Beastie Boys to Method Man) are all exceptionally famous and commercially successful hip hop stars which introduces a particular research bias: they were keen to defend and identify themselves as authentic in order not to be considered sell-outs. It is important to understand why authenticity is such a key issue for 'ordinary' aspiring artists too, whether we consider them as having not much to prove, or conversely, more to prove in order to gain acceptance by peers and scene participants. Although McLeod does not make the distinction between rapper authenticity (i.e. individual status) and hip hop authenticity (i.e. hip hop as a genre and community), through focusing on rappers, he highlights the tension with hip hop authenticity.

Semantic Dimensions	**Real**	**Fake**
Social-psychological	Staying true to yourself	Following mass trends
Racial	Black	White
Political-economic	The underground	Commercial
Gender-sexual	Hard	Soft
Social locational	The street	The suburbs
Cultural	The old school	The mainstream

Table 1. Taken from McLeod (1999:139) 'Support Claims of Authenticity'

McLeod distils pervasive hip hop authenticity discourses into six categories: social-psychological; racial; political-economic; gender-sexual; social locational; and cultural (1999:139). He then places them according to a 'real' and 'fake' dichotomy.

Although McLeod's typology of authenticity is useful, drawing a binary between real and fake is too simplistic. For instance, using an example from McLeod's table, it is possible to stay true to yourself *and* follow mass trends. They are not mutually exclusive which he does not account for. The list of categories is by no means exhaustive either. For example, the creative tension of innovation versus making music close to the sound of the origins of hip hop is not mentioned. Furthermore, social media and the issues surrounding persona and performance complicate the categories and binaries. The research is very specific to the USA, although there are some crossovers with the UK such as the emphasis on the old school rather than the mainstream and staying true to yourself. This raises the question of the extent to which UK based notions of hip hop authenticity are 'inherited' from America or whether they are produced more locally.

Significantly, McLeod's categorisation produces a template whereby 'real' rappers are considered authentic if they stay true to themselves, are black, underground, hard, come from the street and make music based on the 'old school' (1999: 139). Although McLeod claims these are not fixed categories, he presents a very rigid set of rules that rappers ought to follow to be considered authentic. In a similar vein, Harkness (2102) defines the archetypical authentic rapper as black, male, urban, underground, skilled and true to himself in his study of the Chicago hip hop scene. Harkness formulates a theory he calls 'Situational Authenticity' where rappers use rhetoric of authenticity to emphasise and de-emphasise aspects of their identity, through the promotion of more 'interpretative' categories such as skill level and being true to oneself, over fixed categories like black and male. Although Harkness argues he wants to "underscore the flexible and varied uses of the authentic" (2012: 283), he in fact inadvertently demonstrates how static they are in the case of Chicagoan artists as all the rhetoric

centres on the categories of race, gender and class. The categories put forward by Harkness are well known, mostly stereotypical traits of authenticity yet they remain elusive as analytical traits in their own right, and do not appear to capture the full sense of what it means to be an authentic rapper in the twenty-first century. Less tangible and opaque qualities might constitute authenticity such as lyrical content, as well as delivery, persona, consistency between various platforms (performance/online/off-stage), job, everyday life outside of the scene, knowledge, respect and status from others (Laidlaw, 2011). These more intangible traits take into account being an authentic rapper as lived out in daily life rather than purely at a discursive level or being associated with any given rap performance and lyric. Furthermore, Harkness does not address the question of whether it is possible to be authentic and not fulfil these criteria or if there are rappers who, rather than conform to these fixed and imposed notions of authenticity, actually challenge the "hierarchy of normative conditions" (2012: 288). Also, it is unclear where these normative ideas of authenticity come from. Are they historical, socially agreed upon, or spatially and temporally situated?

In Schloss' (2004) research on the DJ and producer community in America, he found that there was a defined code of professional ethics (for example, one must sample from vinyl records and not from compilations) that producers adhered to which ultimately provided the parameters their creativity was assessed against. These rules were considered "timeless and unchanging" because they were seen to be close to the foundation of the culture, ultimately "preserving the essence of hip hop" (2004: 104). In the case of the producer community, these rules or ethical system were used to create and maintain social boundaries, marking out authentic producers from inauthentic producers. Inauthentic producers were ones that did not follow the rules

and were not original, sometimes referred to as ‘biters’ (Schloss, 2004: 106). ‘Biting’ is a term used throughout the hip hop world and constitutes the ultimate inauthentic act as it is essentially plagiarising, ripping off another person’s style, moves or intellectual material and results in a great loss of respect from other hip hoppers. However, the best way to learn and improve is through observing others and imitating various techniques and routines. As Katz (2004) points out, there is a fine and often moving line between biting someone’s moves and creating one’s own. There is thus evidently a challenging tension between on the one hand, following rules, and on the other, innovation and individual expression. This also suggests the contradiction in ‘keeping’ it real versus ‘being’ real.

In a recent study that places UK hip hop and grime in the same genre classification, Dedman’s (2011) ethnographic fieldwork on young hip hop fans (not practitioners) makes a distinction between ‘purists’ and ‘peripherals’. Peripherals engaged with music from a distance, through mostly passive mainstream mediated consumption. Conversely, the purists possessed greater subcultural agency and were engaged in their local scenes, exerting autonomy over their cultural participation. Dedman argues that peripherals were aware that to be considered authentic hip hop fans they needed to present themselves as having niche musical tastes, for instance, demonstrate underground music knowledge, in order to project aspects of authentic cultural engagement. The conceptualisation of authenticity as “consistent distinctiveness” (2011: 516) adopted by Dedman is based on Hodkinson’s subcultural research on taste cultures and capital where “…gaining acceptance, popularity and status was often dependent upon making oneself sufficiently compatible with the distinctive tastes of the culture…” (Hodkinson, 2002: 30). Dedman positions his research in relation to subcultural theory and not in terms of hip hop studies, by making a contribution to

debates on subcultural collectivity and agency. The simplistic dichotomy between all participants falling into two camps of peripheral and purist shows a need for further research into the participation practices and activities of hip hoppers. By focusing on fans, Dedman makes a contribution to what we know about consumption habits but leaves a gap in terms of the producers of rap music. Dedman also did not explore whether racial or socio-economic identity played a role in peripheral and purist distinctions.

2.5 Race

The literature on hip hop and 'racial authenticity' is framed according to notions of essential blackness and critical interrogations of white legitimacy (Harrison, 2008). There has, however, been a recent move to include hip hoppers who fall outside the black-white binary (Ogbar, 2007; Rivera 2003) and hip hop practiced in countries outside the USA (Mitchell, 2001; Condry, 2006). Research on hip hop racial authenticity tends either to promulgate hip hop as a purely black cultural art form, or focuses analyses on the contested acceptability of white hip hoppers. As Harrison summarises, "the base assumptions…have always been that black identity is, by default, legitimate, while white identity is either suspect or invalid" (2008: 1783).

It has been well-documented in hip hop studies literature (Perry, 2004; Rose, 1994) that American hip hop culture during the 1980s and 1990s maintained an ideological commitment to black nationalism and various forms of Afrocentrism (Swedenburg, 2002), that celebrated blackness and pushed whiteness to the periphery (Alim et al., 2009). Most US-based studies on hip hop focused on the construction and status of blackness in hip hop and how their dominance is enforced, leading to the normative

status of blackness within hip hop culture in the USA (Boyd, 2002). Authors such as Dyson (2007) and Perry (2004) herald hip hop as the "best of blackness" and an expression of African-American identity. Others like Rose (1994) have noted that other ethnicities such as such as Puerto Ricans and Afro-Caribbeans, were involved in the creative process of hip hop. In a response to the preponderance of black normativity, many studies have sought to reveal the way other ethnicities, most notably whites, strive to be accepted as authentic hip hoppers (Harkness, 2011; Rodriquez, 2006).

More recent studies have moved beyond racial essentialism and tried to show how race and ethnicity can be co-produced and performed through social processes and as social projects (Omi & Winant, 1994). In an ethnographic study on freestyle rap battles[10] in Los Angeles by Alim et al. (2011), the researchers used discourse analysis to show how black normativity was co-constructed and sometimes challenged by non-black rappers and audience members. Rappers did this through the use of drawing on black or Mexican stereotypes to racialise other rappers. By demonstrating how rap battle participants coproduce and contest hip hop as a black space, the study highlights that "the normative status of particular social identities across sociocultural contexts cannot be seen as a given, but rather, as constantly challenged and maintained by invested actors" (2011: 423). The rap battle thus becomes a multipartied, dialogic site where participants have the potential to reorganise the meanings of multiple kinds of social identities and it appears that youth position themselves, and importantly are positioned by others, along hierarchies of ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality (1994: 426). For example, Asian, black and Latino rappers would draw from and perform a

[10] A rap battle is a competitive style of rapping where two (or sometimes more) opponents take it in turns to 'battle' each other in a verbal duel using lyrics, which are usually improvised. The performances are then judged by the audience or in professional battles by a selected panel of judges.

broad range of racial and ethnic identities that would either produce hip hop as a space of black normativity or challenge this.

Using Nagel's (1994) ideas on ethnicity being fluid and something that undergoes negotiation, redefinition, and reconstruction, Harkness (2011) argues that white rappers in the Chicago scene adopted aspects of what they considered to be black street culture. Some rappers did it consciously but some of the processes occurred at a subconscious level (2011: 60). This finding mirrors research by Cutler (1999) who found white upper middle-class teens employed black linguistic styles in attempts to construct themselves as authentic hip hoppers, but ended up reproducing white male privilege and racism. Although Harkness emphasises there is no such thing as an archetypal white rapper and that there are myriad styles and mutations, he still classified them into two categories: gangsters and backpackers. 'Backpackers' are nerdy emcees who rapped using complex rhyme schemes, large syllable words, and tended to have politically inflected lyrics. In contrast, 'gangsters' are distinguishable by their clothes and style, mostly wearing gaudy jewellery and typically produced lyrics espousing violence, machismo and misogyny (2011: 79). A danger of broadly classifying all the rappers in the study into just two types is the construction of crude stereotypes that become parodies of hip hop. There are artists who do not fit into that categorisation, or straddle both, for example dressing and performing like a gangster but who write songs with a political message. Reducing the complexity of the music, identity and authenticity of a rapper gives the impression the scene is homogenous and free of contradiction, which other studies suggest is not the case.

Research exploring white involvement in hip hop have tended to focus on the discursive strategies and rhetorical devices used by youth to legitimise their

participation in the culture. In Rodriquez's (2006) work on white participation in local American hip hop scenes, he argues white youths employ discursive resources to justify their presence in the scene whereby they remove racially coded meanings embedded in the music and replace them with colour-blind ones. According to Rodriquez, this is an example of colour-blind ideology, "the assertion of essential sameness between racial and ethnic groups despite unequal social locations and distinctive histories" (2006: 645) which reinforces the racial status quo and ultimately denies the reality of inequality. The research focuses on discursive claims and justifications but does not take into account the behaviours or other social practices of white involvement in hip hop. It is arguable that Rodriquez conflates appropriation with colour-blind ideology when they are not the same thing. The example that he draws from in the literature is white appropriation of hip hop in the northern city of Newcastle in the UK where local white British participants reworked rap content to fit their working-class culture. Although this is undeniably appropriation of a music culture by participants who have adopted it elsewhere, it is questionable whether they are "acknowledging the salience of race while denying it for oneself" (2006: 655). Colour-blindness theory appears to mostly look at the white-black binary so the author does not mention Latino, Indian or Asian attendees at the concerts where the research took place and whether they would also be perceived as engaging in colour-blind ideology.

The ongoing appropriation of hip hop by different people has seen white participants use different authenticating strategies to establish their legitimacy in rap music. In the early days of hip hop in the 1980s, the white rap group the Beastie Boys emphasised their whiteness through the clothes they wore and performing songs like 'Fight For Your Right to Party' (Fraley, 2009). Roediger (1999: 116) contends that their brazenly

marked whiteness mocked black art forms. However, as Fraley (2009: 41) notes, over time "white MCs realised their authenticity, legitimacy, acceptance, and success would require different – less mocking – forms of whiteness." According to Hess (2005), the authenticating strategies of white artists include cultural immersion, imitation, and inversion of the rags-to-riches success stories of black rap stars (2005: 372). Hess holds that racial identity in hip hop is inextricably linked to class so white artists invariably emphasise stories of class struggle to counter notions of white privilege. Taking the discrediting of Vanilla Ice following the revelation of his fabricated biography in the early 1990s as his starting point, Hess argues that white artists have subsequently adopted a new model of authenticity in which "being true to yourself and to your lived experiences can eclipse notions of hip hop as explicitly black-owned" (2005: 373). Using Eminem[11] as an example, Hess suggests that the rapper conspicuously shows critical attention to notions of white privilege by emphasising his lower-class background. In contrast, Armstrong (2004) argues that Eminem constructs his authenticity by showing irreverence and crudeness yet at the same time legitimises himself through rejecting a key element of gangsta rap's oppositional nature in his songs – the evocative use of the word 'nigga' (2004: 336). Kajikawa (2009), in an argument similar to Hess (2005), suggests that Eminem emphasises the contradictions in whiteness, particularly with respect to class so he is able to recast himself as the ultimate underdog. The different positions on Eminem highlight the contested and highly charged nature of debates on white participation in hip hop and also emphasise the constructed and strategic side to authenticity.

[11] Eminem is a divisive figure in the hip hop literature with numerous articles devoted to debating his racial authenticity. For further reading see Armstrong (2004), Fraley (2009) and Grealy (2008).

Positioning himself alongside scholars like Imani Perry (2004), Hess maintains that "hip hop music is a black form, given the involvement of African-Americans in the creation, and because its concepts of authenticity are so tied to the roots of its culture (2005: 375). Counter-histories by Flores (1994) and Guevara (1996) which call for more recognition of Puerto Ricans' and women's creative roles in the development of hip hop are called into question by Hess because they were apparently mostly break-dancers and graffiti artists rather than rappers. Significantly, Latino artists had less trouble than white artists in establishing their legitimacy, Hess argues, because hip hop is a resistant culture and the dominant culture is white. However, other scholars have pointed out the limitations of hip hop as a resistant culture as it gets harnessed by the mainstream (Krims, 2000) and, indeed, some question whether it was ever resistant at all (Templeton, 2005). George (1999: 57) contends that hip hop is not, and never was, an exclusively black culture, in that it was never "solely African-American created, owned, controlled, and consumed". Schloss, in one of the few studies that focuses on DJs and producers, takes the middle ground in arguing that "the rules of hip hop are African-American, but one does not need to be African-American to follow them" (2004: 10). This perspective allows non-blacks, and indeed anyone from any place, to participate in hip hop.

Global hip hop and race

In hip hop studies outside the context of the USA, authenticity is still contested along racial lines. Dutch-language hip hop, known as "Nederhop" features almost exclusively white Dutch youth. Although Nederhop is a linguistically and culturally localised manifestation, it struggles against more American/English oriented rap by non-White immigrant youth, who can claim greater global authenticity in terms of the

discourses of marginalisation and racial identification within hip hop (Pennycook, 2007). However, any hip hop expression outside the African-American experience is deemed inauthentic by some. For instance, Bynoe argues that "technical aspects" of rap music can be learned by foreigners but "the central part of hip hop culture is the story-telling and the information that it imparts about a specific group of people," namely "black people in America" (2002: 77). As Gelder observes, the 'white rapper' is condemned always to be inauthentic, but "from a global perspective, however, it seems as if pretty much anyone can do it" (Gelder, 2007: 120). Yet the appropriation of hip hop reiterates notions of the 'Elvis effect' – "black folk make music, and whites remake it and make big bucks…Where is the line between cross-cultural influence and cross-cultural theft?" (Dreisinger, 2002: 134). If hip hoppers pay homage to their originators, can it still be considered 'theft'? Or as Condry puts it, are artists and fans "doing their homework?" (Condry, 2006: 33). Laidlaw (2011) found that being well versed in American rap and knowing the origins of hip hop was a form of authenticity capital as it displayed insider knowledge and bestowed higher status to the person (Thornton, 1996). Maxwell's (2003) solution around issues of ethnicity in his Australian hip hop study is to identify authenticity not deriving from race but from a notion of truthfulness to one's self. "It's okay to be white and into hip hop as long as you don't misrepresent who you are, as long as you don't simulate blackness" (Maxwell, 2003: 161).

Although there is a long history of white British appropriation of black music and culture[12], Bennett (2000) notes there has been little attempt to study white appropriation of hip hop in the context of the UK. Bennett argues that in many parts of

[12] For historical accounts of white appropriations of black music in Britain, see Oliver (1990), Fryer (1998) and Bradley (2001).

the UK, appropriation of hip hop involved Afro-Caribbean and Asian youth before white people. According to Cobley and Osgerby's (1995) research on race in Peckham, London, Afro-Caribbeans refused to take white appropriations of hip hop style seriously, much less view them as authentic expressions of hip hop. Asian rap groups such as Asian Dub Foundation, FunDaMental, Hustlers HC &ADF fused bhangra with rap to mark out a "*strategic* Asian identity" that articulated dimensions of Asian culture and political life in Britain pertinent to them (Sharma, 1996: 44). These South Asian fusion groups used hip hop to carve out symbolic cultural spaces, forming new identities that eschewed Englishness (Bennett, 2001: 97). It is arguable that hip hop is thus a means of resisting "hegemonic culturist definitions…offer[ing] the possibility of simultaneously invoking/affirming/de-centring a politicised category of 'Asian' or its particular ethnicities in a racist British social formation" (Sharma, 1996: 44). The white working class youth of Newcastle in Bennett's study felt a certain affinity with African-American and black minority groups, although the researcher emphasises the importance of acknowledging the actively constructed nature of such a cultural association, rather than viewing it simply as a product of structural circumstances (Bennett, 2000: 152). The constructed ideological position seemed to consider 'blackness' itself less important. Bennett highlights this could be due to 'place' as Newcastle has a majority white population but most British contexts where hip hop has been appropriated have a prominent black population that serves as a continual point of reference for such appropriations. In the case of Newcastle, then, white responses to the 'black' characteristics of hip hop, "amounts to a celebration of blackness in the absence of blackness" (Bennett, 2000: 152).

A study on white appropriation of hip hop by Laidlaw (2011), also in Newcastle, sought to reveal the reasons why white youth adopt a lifestyle very different to their

local, white and 'northern' culture and how they do this without any proximity to a black population. Laidlaw found that white hip hoppers constructed 'new ethnicities' (Back, 1996) that were 'glocal', through incorporating afro-diasporic culture with their own local influences. Laidlaw does not define his key terms, employing 'fan' and 'participant' interchangeably, so it is never fully clear whether he is referring to fans, rappers or the scene as a whole. Through his research, Laidlaw found authenticity to be a commonly invoked concept by participants of the Newcastle scene. Laidlaw argues, "the triple signifiers of individuality, knowledge and lifestyle constitute the experience of authenticity for the average avid hip-hop fan based in Newcastle" (2011: 210). It was deemed important for artists to 'live what you rap about' and not embody any kind of persona. Participants made a distinction between those that 'lived' hip hop who were seen to be more authentic, and those that 'acted' hip hop, who were derided as 'fakers'. The idea of an artist being inseparable from their art reflects Becker's (1982) argument and also emphasises the importance of rappers' lives and music aligning in the quest to live out authenticity.

The contested positions and stances discussed here point to the need to tread very carefully before reinforcing any essentialist assumptions underlying existing discussion of race and authenticity. Following Harrison (2008: 1784), I contend that the framework of racial authenticity of black legitimacy and (questionable) white illegitimacy is limited. Firstly, it ignores the range of people of different ethnicities who hold a strong attachment to hip hop. Secondly, there is a tendency within such a binary position to reduce complex cultural practices and processes into simplified oppositional stances. Going forward, I take the view that hip hop is both African-American culture *and* a global culture that is continually situated in the various contexts it is practiced.

2.6 Class

Social class, which is very often linked to race, appears to be equally important in authenticity stakes. In hip hop, working class artists or rappers who have experienced a form of social struggle are perceived to be more legitimate (Hess, 2005), especially those who make 'conscious' or political hip hop. Lipsitz (1997) argues that to make politically inflected music, it is important to have experienced displacement and struggle for identity and cultural recognition which many African, Asian and Latin-American people have, due to being subjected to colonial repression, ruling out many white people. Hess (2005) aruges that hip hop credibility is negotiated through an artist's experiences of social struggle. These arguments raise the question of whether middle-class (white) rappers who have not experienced social struggle can make authentic hip hop. This example again highlights the distinction between 'hip hop authenticity' and 'rapper authenticity' and whether some artists are more authorised than others in their 'scene' to make rap music. It also raises an interesting question about who is doing the authorising as it is arguably not just those in the scene but the wider music industry too. As struggle and marginalisation hold such weight in hip hop authenticity, the usual values of Western neoliberal society such as being wealthy, well educated, and white, are inverted in rap. It therefore is more desirable to be poor, lower class and of a racial origin other than white, as they are deemed to be more 'authentic' and credible (Wermuth, 2001).

Responding to what he calls the high amount of 'class determinism' evident in hip hop scholarly discourse, Schloss (2004) contends that contrary to many scholars heralding hip hop as a vehicle of expression for the poor and oppressed, participating

in the DJing and producing side of the culture requires substantial monetary investment. Buying turntables, vinyl, speakers and so on, made it an expensive hobby that most working class youth, especially in the Bronx ghetto, could simply not afford. However, Schloss (2004: 27) does concede that certain other elements of hip hop, for instance break-dancing and rapping, may well be products of economic adversity. Schloss argues that focusing on material circumstance demeans the creativity and agency of the artists involved, suggesting they had no other choice but to create what they did as no other option was available to them (2004: 28). There seems to be a tendency for scholars to naturalise the emergence of hip hop in suggesting it was inevitable when actually agency was paramount because hip hop "was created by African-American *people*, each of whom had volition, creativity and choice as to how to proceed" (2004: 27). Here, Schloss draws attention to the agency versus determinism tension, arguing agents have choice and freedom in their practices rather than being socially determined by structure and environment.

Class continues to be a slippery and contentious concept in academic literature. There are some theorists who see contemporary society as classless and instead individualised such as Beck (2000), joining others who have heralded the death of class (Bauman, 1992; Crook et al., 1992; Paksulski & Waters, 1996) because of a breakdown between economic position and cultural identity. Others' research backs this up with data suggesting high levels of social mobility and meritocracy in contemporary Britain (Nettle, 2003). In contrast, there are traditionalists who roundly reject the idea of a death of class (Goldthorpe & Marshall, 1992; Hout et al., 1993). Savage (2000: 85) sees the positions articulated by both class traditionalists and postmodern writers as "a defensive attempt to shore up class analysis" in the absence of clear-cut identities (Bottero, 2004). Richard Florida in his book *The Rise of the*

Creative Class (2012) takes a different approach in emphasising the social, economic and cultural conditions that have brought about rapid change in social dynamics, identity and hierarchy. Florida argues we are seeing changes on a scale akin to those brought about by the industrial revolution as the internet, rise of new technologies and globalisation are altering the way we live and work. However, he contends that societal shifts have led to the emergence of a new social class, the 'creative class', whereby creativity is a fundamental economic driver. This view perhaps explains the growth of rappers, DJs, and musicians able to make a living from hip hop. All these different theories point to a shift of detraditionalisation in society (Beck et al., 1994) where class distinctions have blurred and continue to alter; yet inequality still persists. Hip hop can be seen as both constitutive of, and as a response to, the onset of 'reflexive modernity' (Beck, 2000) which alongside social mobility, is characterised by the rise of digitisation and globalisation.

2.7 Appropriation: Global, Local and 'Glocal' Hip Hop

As we have already seen, scholarship concerning the spread of global hip hop is highly polarised in nature. On the one hand, there are those commentators for whom hip hop "is and always will be a culture of the African-American minority…an international language, a style that connects and defines the self-image of countless teenagers" (Bozza, 2003: 130). On the other hand are scholars such as Perry (2004: 19), who argue that black American music is a commercial product that has been exported globally, creating "a subaltern voice in the midst of the imperialistic exportation of culture". Levy (2001: 134) describes hip hop as "a global, post-industrial signifying practice, giving new parameters of meaning to otherwise locally or nationally diverse identities". Mitchell (2001) celebrates global hip hop and argues

it cannot be viewed simply as African-American because it has become "a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world" (2001: 1). However, Gelder (2007) contends that although hip hop is unfolding in various places, outside US metropolitan centres, Michell's notion of vernacular hip hop ends up being just as parochial and romantic as the black nationalists (Gelder, 2007: 120). Specifically relevant to my study is Pennycook (2007: 102) who highlights that the global spread of hip hop has also spread the calls to authenticity prevalent in hip hop culture, which "pulls the ideology of keeping it real back toward local definitions of what matters." Although global hip hop studies is a growing area of research, not many studies have looked specifically at authenticity, but more generally at identity construction (Hill, 2009: Bennett, 2000), localisation (Condry, 2006; Androutsopoulos, 2003) and linguistics (Alim et al., 2009; Pennycook, 2006; Omoniyi, 2006). Most of the literature on global hip hop is framed around the tension between the global and the local.

The simultaneous processes of globalisation and localisation of hip hop culture(s) and the tensions between the two processes offers us an opportunity to explore complex issues such as migration and diaspora, language, transnationalism, hybridity and indigenisation to name but a few (Alim et al., 2009). The term 'glocalisation', coined by Robertson (1995), provides a way of understanding how the local and global is often defined by the other and that they intersect rather than oppose each other. Most studies on global hip hop recognise that in its initial stages, appropriations of hip hop outside the USA often copied and mimicked American models but over time and as the culture took root, hip hop scenes developed from an adoption to an adaptation of US musical forms and styles (Mitchell, 2001).

Using a textual analysis approach in a study on rap discourse in 50 hip hop songs from the European countries of Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Greece, Androutsopoulos and Scholz (2003) found there was a dialectic of 'global' and 'local' self-positioning in rap discourse. Adopting Lull's (1995) theory of reterritorialisation, the research suggests there are three stages in hip hop appropriation. Firstly, *transculturation* where rap music is transmitted to new countries and accrues fans there. Secondly, the music is adopted and adjusted to local conditions resulting in *hybridization*. Then finally through *indigenisation*, the music becomes integrated into native cultural repertoires (2003: 475). The rap music produced in the European countries featured in the study articulate authenticity by showing knowledge of American hip hop, for instance including US references, but alongside local points of reference too. Also, the music expressed local concerns and social realities, performed in regional and social dialects. The authors conclude by arguing that European rappers saw themselves as "being a local representative of a global cultural discourse" which is not only important in their self-understanding and identity construction as the authors note, but also key in terms of authenticity. This emphasises the importance to take into account the tension between the local and global.

In a move to highlight the similarities, rather than differences in global hip hop, Motley & Henderson's (2008) comparative study aimed to look at global hip hop as a whole, rather than specific countries and localised scenes, and found there were significant multiple commonalities between the USA and global hip hop. The authors argue that all the scenes shared a sense of marginality and oppression, both real and imagined. They base this idea on Osumare's (2007; 2001) notion of 'collective marginalities', which refers to the social resonances between black expressive culture within its political history and similar dynamics in other nations. These tend to fall

along the lines of culture itself, historical oppression, class, or the discursive construction of 'youth' as a peripheral social status (Osumare, 2001: 172). Including the word 'imagined', as well as real, in terms of a sense of marginality is important because it acknowledges the fact that participants may on a socio-economic level be middle- or even upper-class yet still feel frustrated or marginalised in some way. Other similarities across global hip hop included the use of hip hop in constructing ethnic, cultural and generational group identities, and an interchange between the global and local. They suggest the reason for hip hop's pervasive diffusion across the world and striking commonalities between scenes is largely down to the internet as it facilitates interaction among hip hop consumers and the exchange of knowledge, events, language patterns and various forms of media. The research reflects the observation of Lipsitz (1994) that transnational linkages are increasingly formed through popular culture. Lipsitz argues that the conduits of commercial culture, such as hip hop, "illuminate affinities, resemblances, and potentials for alliances among a world population that now must be dynamic and as mobile as the forces of capital" (1994:16). A comparative study on this scale is useful in determining similarities between seemingly heterogeneous scenes but as the authors themselves point out, this particular study was limited due to it focusing purely on consumption and fans rather than the producers of the music.

Condry's (2006; 2001; 2000) research on Japanese hip hop addresses key questions in regard to appropriated culture such as 'can Japanese artists produce 'real' hip hop or is it just an imitation?' and 'how does one evaluate the local influence of foreign culture?'. Whether one considers the dispersion of hip hop around the globe as 'diffusion' or 'cultural imperialism', Condry highlights the difficulty of analysing such phenomena without essentialising either the local or foreign culture (2000: 167).

Condry argues that the focus on marginalisation and the lower classes, characteristic of American hip hop and scholarship does not fit Japan. When hip hop was originally imported into Japan, it was never established as a music rooted in street culture but offered an appealing alternative to the current range of music options for middle class youth. Japanese hip hop then became a way of distinguishing participants from what they saw as homogenous mainstream culture and functioned as a kind of generational protest (2000: 167). The findings of his research indicate that American hip hop has not simply been imitated in Japan, but reinterpreted to fit with the Japanese context and made meaningful by lyrics focusing on issues close to themselves and the lives they lead. Therefore, "Japanese rap is more real for Japanese than American rap" (2000: 181). In the case of UK hip hop, the culture was initially taken up by working-class youth and grounded in a sense of marginalisation, however over time, middle-class and diverse participants got involved. Despite this, hip hop is still viewed as a form of protest music among youth in London (Wood, 2009).

In Wermuth's (2001) study of the Amsterdam hip hop scene, she discusses authenticity according to particular dichotomies she identified based on socio-cultural conditions such as space, ethnicity, gender and class. These include: local versus global, artistic integrity versus sell-out, masculine versus feminine, and black versus white, where each first-mentioned term is seen to be desirable and positive qualities of the music. Wermuth takes as her starting premise that if authentic cultural expressions are real and original, Dutch hip hop cannot, by definition, be authentic. As such, her research seeks to reveal how Dutch hip hoppers deal with this and understand their participation in the culture. She found that to legitimise their involvement in hip hop (what I refer to as 'hip hop authenticity'), participants strictly adhered to American models of rap. For example one rapper stated: "You have to stick to the rules of hip

hop. Hip hop has its origins in America, so you have to rap in American slang. That's the rule" (2001: 153). If anyone did not follow the 'rules' and came up with something else, they were deemed inauthentic and accused of selling out. American hip hop was considered authentic, original and 'pure' so anything that deviated was automatically categorised as inauthentic. Issues surrounding migration and ethnicity were even pitted in terms of racial differences between blacks and whites in America (2001: 160). Although Dutch hip hop resembles US rap in many ways, Wermuth argues that rather than it being direct imitation, it is more to do with global culture and the absence of black role models in Dutch society. As such, African and Caribbean diaspora feel they have more in common with African-Americans than with indigenous Dutch people (2001: 164). The tension between obeying the 'rules' of hip hop and innovation also gets at the struggle between what can be seen as 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity'. Rappers are required to manage the extent to which they make hip hop their own, whilst also striving to make it fit what they and other scene members perceive it to be.

In Kahf's (2007) study on Arabic hip hop, in which he analysed 45 songs by ten Palestinian artists, he found that Palestinian hip hop claims authenticity in three ways. The first is by addressing real social problems that the artists claim are unspoken about in their community. The second is by focusing on people's shared experiences of suffering. Thirdly, by distinguishing hip hop as a unique form of expression and resistance (2007: 362). The study indicates how rappers arguably have a significant role in society in reflecting the concerns and issues facing young people, and that authenticity is partly based on holding up a mirror to society to make these matters visible. However, it is important to bear in mind hip hop's potentially limited emancipatory power because of the ongoing commodification of resistance

(Templeton, 2005) which Kahf does not critically explore. The research is also valuable in highlighting the nuanced variations of what constitutes authenticity in different countries and cultures, as it is not always the same as other research has suggested (Motley & Henderson, 2008).

In one of few studies that has explored the appropriation of hip hop in a British context, Bennett found that rather than the localisation of hip hop being a smooth and consensual transition, it was fraught with tensions and contradictions as youth attempted "to reconcile issues of musical and stylistic authenticity with those of locality, identity and everyday life" (2000: 138). This indicates the challenging nature of living out authenticity on an everyday basis. Bennett (2000) also observed that issues of identity and authenticity tended to be articulated around notions of space and place. To create 'authentic music', artists drew on a range of locally embedded reference points, sensibilities and images centred around the familiar and easily recognisable (Bennett, 2000). This is evident in the rap group London Posse, who formed in the mid 1980s, became popular for their individual sound of merging reggae with hip hop beats and rapping in a mixture of cockney and patois, whist emphasising their south London accents. Through songs such as 'Original London Style' and 'How's Life in London', they began to assert a distinct English identity and created a localised variation of hip hop. A more recent example of hybridized UK hip hop is the artist Roots Manuva who frequently references British culture such as drinking bitter and eating cheese on toast, yet also talks about Jamaican food like jerk chicken and places such as Banana Hole, the Jamaican village his parents are from. Although the London scene is intensely local in terms of the participants, content of songs and language, the global influences of migrants in the city mean the global and local intersect rather than conflict with each other. The increasing hybridisation of rap

music raises the question of whether the more hybridised it becomes, the more important the notion of authenticity is as it faces being irrevocably transformed, or alternatively, as Frith (2000) put it, hybridity *is* "the new authenticity." This refers to the idea that notions of hip hop authenticity are perpetuated through an authenticating discourse of hybridity (Stokes, 2004).

Other studies on hip hop in various countries have indicated that different scenes have different ways of claiming and marking authenticity. For example in Australia, authenticity was constructed by artists distancing themselves from commercial American hip hop and the mainstream Australian music industry (Mitchell, 2007). In specifically Aboriginal hip hop, Morgan and Warren (2011) found authentic hip hop constituted talking about issues relating to them, for instance expressions of urban warrior masculinity, angry separatism and the encouragement of resistance, but also using music to encourage pride. In a bid to not be considered an imitation or derivative of African-American hip hop, rap music in Nigeria has been modified to carve out an independent glocal identity. Omoniyi (2006) argues hip hop in Nigeria is considered more authentic when it has incorporated pidgin English in the rapping. Other ways Nigerian hip hop departed from mainstream global hip hop was through the general apoliticism of the music, and absence of gangster and misogynistic themes in favour of love stories. Nigerian artists also often employ cross-referencing as an "intertextual strategy to authenticate the (re)appropriated product" (Omoniyi, 2006: 201). For hip hoppers in Istanbul, authenticity is constructed via discourses of being 'underground' functioning not just to connote status in the community but was also used to create boundaries around the community (Soloman, 2005). It appears that appropriated hip hop is considered more authentic by practitioners and commentators alike when it is 'localised' to fit the local conditions and people at the site of

appropriation. Based on the examples cited above, this can encompass employing one's own language when rapping, making the content of songs reflect local issues of concern, following some US hip hop-based 'rules' yet also clearly departing from them, distinguishing oneself from either mainstream American rap or the dominant popular music in one's own country in order to be 'underground', and the creation of hybridised identities incorporating personal, national, local and hip hop strands.

2.8 Commercialisation

Hip hop is often heralded as a 'resistant' or counter-cultural phenomenon because it can provide a voice to marginalised communities and is fearless in highlighting inequalities and problems in society, most commonly race relations and politics (Stover, 1999). Indeed, one of the appealing characteristics of hip hop for fans is that it is perceived to be resistant and on the margins. As Kitwana comments, countless youth who felt alienated in mainstream American life found refuge in hip hop (2005: 121). However as hip hop becomes more commoditised, commentators have tried to reconcile its position as a conduit for ideas and images articulating emancipatory perspectives whilst being marketed through highly centralised monopolies. Lipsitz argues that hip hop is protest music against the conditions of oligopolies, yet much of the culture has decided to work *through* rather than *outside* existing structures (1997: 36). In contrast to the emancipatory rhetoric, Chang (2005: 448) states, "In this late capitalist logic, it was not the rappers' message that brought the audience together, it was the things the audience bought that brought the rappers together." Templeton (2005) argues that the insistence on reading hip hop as resistance can be read as a reluctance to acknowledge the complete commodification of cultural practice, including resistance itself. Similarly Pennycook (2004: 11) suggests there is nothing

inherently oppositional or resistant about rap as it is as equally capable of "being commercialised, conformist and conservative (as well as violent, misogynistic and homophobic) as many other popular cultural forms." However, as Krims (2000) notes, it depends on your definition of resistance, as rap music might be 'resistant' in the sense of carving out spaces of freedom and pleasure, rather than offer revolutionary political force. Although like other cultural forms, hip hop can be easily put to the service of dominant ideologies (Krims, 2000: 1), Negus (1999) warns us that we "need to be wary of increasingly routine rhetoric and romanticization of rap musicians as oppositional rebels 'outside' the corporate system, as iconoclasts in revolt against 'the mainstream'" because it is "a discourse that has often been imposed on rap and not necessarily from hip hop participants" (Negus, 1999: 96). Indeed, although there are artists resisting mainstream corporations through striving to stay underground and on independent labels, there are others who seek mainstream popularity and a wide audience of listeners. Following Krims (2000), it is possible that even artists deemed 'mainstream' still have the potential to be resistant, as it depends on how you define resistance.

Media and technology played an influential role in bringing rap music to mainstream consumption. Some scholars have argued this placed an emphasis on authenticity in hip hop as it was called into question under the threat of assimilation into dominant popular culture (McLeod, 1999). The explosion of cable television saw the emergence of music videos through channels such as MTV, which became the fastest growing cable channel and a guaranteed way of gaining exposure to young people in America. However, MTV excluded black artists from airplay and it was not until Columbia threatened to boycott, that they started to play Michael Jackson videos in 1983 (Chang, 2005). As hip hop rose in popularity, and with crossover songs such as 'Walk This

Way' (1986) featuring rap duo Run-DMC with rock star Steven Tyler Aerosmith, MTV, record labels began to realise that hip hop was not just a passing fad, and actively strove to market the music. Entertainment industries like MTV are frequently blamed for the commercialisation of rap as it became suddenly marketable to white suburban teenagers (Rose, 1994) and subjected to the 'white gaze' (Kitwana, 1994). Similarly, Stapleton (1998) notes how black art consumed by white youth allowed white participants to become 'ghetto chic' without actually ever having to live in ghetto conditions. Rap artists began to alter their style for the reward of financial payment and public popularity, leading to what some call 'pop rap' (Perry, 2004). Successful artists defended their choices through framing their justification in terms of resisting crime and possessing entrepreneurial spirit (Hess, 2007). The gradual commercialisation of hip hop has led to a prominence of authenticity (keepin' it real) discourses marking distinctions between mainstream and underground hip hop.

Hip hop's emergence in the information age sets it apart from many other music genres as its capacity to reach around the globe meant its whole culture, ethos, and identity (not just music per se) could be consumed. Kitwana (2005) blames the mass media and telecommunication industries to be largely responsible for the commercialisation of hip hop because as part of the American entertainment industry, hip hop became "for sale to all buyers" (2005: xiii). Kitwana defined 'mainstream hip hop' as "the aspects of the culture that have been packaged, often distorted and then sold by corporate America" (2005: xiii), which suggests a corruption of a culture or music that was previously pure. This sentiment was echoed by the rapper Nas in naming his 2006 album 'Hip Hop is Dead', causing controversy and prompting various mixed responses from artists and commentators within the hip hop music community. Dyson (2007) believes this statement actually jump-started a new phase

of its growth. Scholars such as Perry (2004) agree with Dyson that rather than hip hop dying, it is simply reformulating itself in the face of mainstream co-optation. Huq (2007) makes the important point that it is not helpful to draw a binary as Nas did of commercial being bad, and subculturally 'pure' being automatically good, as this is a false dichotomy. Music can rarely be classified using such a clear-cut commercial/non-commercial definition. However, this type of boundary work is clearly very common in claiming authenticity (Hodkinson, 2002).

Marking out certain boundaries and tastes around hip hop and its various subgenres[13] can function as authenticity markers that work in the service of specific individual and collective interests (Harrison, 2009). As Krims point out, within scenes there can be varying conceptualisations of what real hip hop is: "Fans of each [hip hop] genre not infrequently tout theirs as the true rap genre asserting like-wise that fans of other genres have somehow betrayed something essential about rap music" (2000: 48). In his book *Hip Hop Underground*, Kwame Harrison argues that practitioners and fans of 'underground' hip hop regard themselves as the intellectually informed segment of the hip hop community. Therefore being well read, having knowledge of hip hop history and the underground scene are forms of capital that get frequently leveraged in constructing authenticity claims (2009: 85).

Negus (1999) highlights the necessity of taking into account the wider institutional context of the music industry when discussing hip hop because in his opinion cultural explanations alone are not enough. To recognise rap as a form of cultural expression and communication, it is necessary to understand it as "a business that links and

[13] Rap music can be divided into various subgenres, which include fusions with other genres or regional styles of hip hop. For instance: gangsta, conscious, crunk, east coast, west coast, old skool, golden era, rapcore, G-funk, freestyle and so on. For a more detailed summary see Harrison (2009).

separates artist and audience in quite distinct ways" (1999: 85). Negus holds that rap artists championed as authentic and creative iconoclasts from the periphery of society is a construction central to the practices and aesthetics of the music industry and that we must acknowledge that rap is not potentially from the margins or 'outside' (1999: 85). Music industry executives deploy discourses around 'the street' to operate as a type of knowledge that legitimates the belief that rap is and should be outside the corporate suite (1999: 86). The commercialisation of hip hop has made many commentators cynical about hip hop's potential as a voice for the oppressed. But it depends where one places the central components of authenticity – is it in the music, the person, the message, the record label or between all of them? For example, for some hip hop fans the fact Jay Z is on a major record label (Def Jam owned by Universal) does not have any bearing on his authentic status as a rap artist, whereas to others, it is the epitome of mainstream culture and selling out. This creates a tension between what can be understood as 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity', which can sometimes align but often conflict with one another. The value laden dimension of authenticity means that in light of the relationship between hip hop and capitalism, artists want to give the impression of not selling-out. However selling-out itself is a slippery concept – where is the line between making a (successful) living and being considered a commercial sell-out? A sense of integrity or even morality has arguably been attached to hip hop since its commercialisation which has led to discourses surrounding the mainstream and underground growing in prominence. It is clear that when seeking to understand authenticity in the context of the London hip hop scene, it is vital to also consider the economic and capitalist forces that shape and influence those involved.

2.9 Conclusion

Scholarship on hip hop authenticity is mostly articulated along lines of race, class, and commercialisation. The racial authenticity debates in hip hop indicate a tension around essentialist framings of race (Dyson, 2007; Kitwana, 2005) versus a more co-produced conceptualisation (Alim et al., 2011). Growing scholarship has focused on white participation in hip hop and the ways in which white rappers legitimise their involvement, and where white artists Vanilla Ice, the Beastie Boys, and Eminem are controversial figures that either aided (Hess, 2005) or tarnished (White, 2006) the white rappers' cause. The commercialisation of hip hop is a contested area with some suggesting rap culture still holds powers of resistance (Tate, 2003) but most maintaining resistance itself has been commodified (Templeton, 2005; Pennycook, 2004). The need to take into account the wider influence of the music industry, particularly the notion of 'selling out' has been highlighted. Also, the discourses surrounding the 'mainstream' and 'underground' are key to authenticity debates (Harrison, 2009). As the context of hip hop production and performance is continually changing, a conceptual framework that accounts for a differentiated and emergent social reality is necessary.

Countries where hip hop has taken root have distinctively different ways of articulating and conveying authenticity that are dependent on the issues and culture of the participants. Broadly speaking, the literature suggests hip hop is considered authentic when it has been reworked and modified to fit the local site of appropriation. The examination of hip hop in various geographical and political realities challenges hegemonic readings of hip hop as either parody or primarily based on style and lifestyle (Alim, 2006). Rather than global hip hop being merely an imitation of US rap, the reinterpretations are meaningful expressions by creative agents. While

acknowledging the importance of its American origins, following Mitchell (2001) and Alim (2009), I would argue that the global significance of hip hop has gone beyond a simple identification with one originating culture.

Yet it is important to acknowledge that however 'localised' and introspective a hip hop scene becomes, there is still a degree of interplay between the global and local forces of globalisation (Androutsopoulos & Scholz, 2003). Also, one must note that agents of global hip hop put in a great deal of (often self-conscious) cultural work in an effort to express local identities through engagement with the global (Alim et al., 2009: 9). However, as Pennycook (2007) argues, it is not particularly helpful to position 'American' versus the 'global' as global hip hop cultures are comprised of multiple 'circuits of flow' through which hip hop circulates globally. Much of the research in global hip hop studies focuses on discourse and lyrics and thus leaves a gap for more in depth studies that understand more fully the role of hip hop in participants' everyday lives. A further noticeable absence is scholarship on UK hip hop, where to my knowledge, no published work specifically focuses on London hip hop and authenticity. The ontological or 'lived out' nature of authenticity that incorporates what rappers do both on and offstage, online and in everyday life requires a theoretical perspective that is able to account for this stratified existence. Critical realism, introduced as a key meta-theoretical foundation for my study, is outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

> Dell Hymes perfectly defined ethnography as 'bearing honorable witness to something human.' That should be guidance enough.
>
> Henry Glassie (2006: 422)

3.1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate how rappers 'live out' authenticity in the London hip hop scene. To meet this objective, it is necessary to position the study as a whole from a meta-theoretical perspective. Taking into account the study's primary focus on the existence of authenticity *per se*, I begin by making the case for adopting critical realism as an 'underlabouring' philosophical foundation for the study. I then justify employing ethnography as the most appropriate research design. A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of ethnographic research follows. After that I delineate the particular research methods employed, referring specifically to participant observation and qualitative interviews, and explaining the sampling and data collection procedures. Questions around ethics are considered, before finally addressing issues of researcher positionality and reflexivity.

3.2 Critical realism as philosophical under-labourer

Any project exploring how rappers live out authenticity needs to make its foundational assumptions about the world explicit. The philosophical worldview that underpins research has a fundamental role in research design, despite it not always being acknowledged. For a social science researcher, one's philosophical position is

paramount for consistent and coherent research. After all, this influences problem definition, epistemology, research design, methodology, and data analysis. Broadly speaking, there are three dominant views on the nature of social reality – positivism, social constructivism and (critical) realism (Mingers, 2004). These varying philosophical perspectives will be discussed before explaining why I have aligned myself with critical realism.

Positivists, otherwise known as empiricists or empirical realists, believe that there is an external knowable reality that we can understand through our senses. This stands in contrast to idealists who believe human beings create rather than discover reality. In reaction to the extreme positions of positivism and idealism, a number of middle positions have developed including logical positivism, materialism, actionalism, constructivism and critical realism (Potter, 1996). The fundamental assumption of the constructivist paradigm is that "reality is socially constructed" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 1). Social constructivists hold that individuals and groups construct knowledge, creating a culture of shared meanings. When something is socially constructed, it does not have an essential or inherent quality but rather is manufactured by a particular group (Houston, 2001). In contrast, critical realists believe that there is an external reality outside of our thinking that we can acquire knowledge about. Critical realists are 'realist' because they believe we *can* know (however fallibly) the world as it really is. In contrast to positivists, critical realists recognize that all observation is fallible and has error, not least because perception is masked by the human mind (Yeung, 1997). Therefore, a critical realist is 'critical' about our ability to know reality with certainty. Although all research is fallible, it does not mean we should not try to understand reality. The critical realist's chosen methodology assumes a crucial

importance. As Sayer (2000:19) notes “the particular choices should depend on the nature of the object of study and what one wants to learn about it”.

Critical realism is associated with the philosopher Roy Bhaskar who combined a general philosophy of science (transcendental realism) with a philosophy of social science (critical naturalism) in order to describe the relationship between natural and social worlds (Easton, 2009). Sayer suggests our fallible knowledge of the world – “the experience of getting things wrong, of having our expectations confounded, and of crashing into things” indicates the world exists regardless of what we happen to think about it (Sayer, 2000: 2). Crucially, Bhaskar conceptualises the world as a socially situated but not socially determined one, therefore there is the possibility of social change and ultimately an enhancement of human freedom. As the world is socially situated, critical realism argues for a relational perspective, seeing society as “an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform” (Bhaskar, 1991: 76). As such, when conducting research, we should not concentrate solely on a single level investigation of the society, group or individual but human practices, and what motivates, enables and constrains those practices. Many critical realist projects make use of triangulation, that is the application of multiple measures and observations, for this reason.

Critical realist ontology holds that social objects are real whether or not they are known. For example, entities such as class structures and patriarchal structures do not have to be identified in order to exist (Collier, 1994: 6). The same, it might be argued, could be held for authenticity. It is important to stress here that realism is not incompatible with constructivist epistemology as it recognises that knowledge is a social and historical product and produced through practices. Our understanding of the

world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint (Maxwell, 2012). However, constructivism and interpretivism have a tendency to reduce social life wholly to the level of meaning, ignoring material change, what happens to people, and the deep structure of social objects, putting researchers in danger of confusing their constructions with those of the people they study (Sayer, 2000: 102). Rather than focus on linguistics and discourse in knowledge practices, for my research, it is important to take into account (capitalist) structures and institutions that motivate, enable and constrain music production and identity practices. These social structures are invisible but nonetheless real. Critical realists believe that the institutions, structures, norms and conventions in society are both reproduced and transformed through the actions of people (whether they are aware of it or not). Furthermore, the actions of people are themselves subject to the pre-existing conditions (institutions, structures, norms and conventions etc.) that they find themselves in. Thus, rappers are in multiple ways motivated, enabled and constrained by the pre-existing conditions in which they are living and rapping. It is my task as a researcher to understand the interconnections between human agency and the underlying structures, which can help us explain the phenomena of rappers making music and their lived out authenticity.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, authenticity has been theorised quite differently depending on the underlying philosophical position of the researcher. The two most prevalent conceptualisations of authenticity are broadly either essentialist (Kornblith, 2002) or socially constructed (Peterson, 1997; Anand & Jones, 2005; Graham, 2001). The limitation with essentialist notions of authenticity, which tend to be framed around ‘origins’ arguments, is that they fix authenticity into something that is static and unchanging. This seems highly problematic in the context of hip hop where, as we have seen, there is a very strong undercurrent of creativity and change.

Social constructionist conceptualisations of authenticity, on the other hand, tend towards a relativist position (Hammersley, 1992) and are more concerned with constructed knowledge claims (epistemology) than with what authenticity actually is (ontology) (Andrews, 2012). As constructionism rests on the belief that reality is socially constructed, it emphasises language as an important means by which we interpret experience and thus draws heavily on discourse analysis (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). The literature review in the previous chapter documented the preponderance of textual and discursive studies in hip hop which use discourse analytical tools (Alim et al., 2009). As my research is looking at lived out authenticity, I need a theoretical framework that accounts for authenticity existing in and through human practices that considers ontological as well as epistemological and discursive facets. By emphasising what people do, over and above what they say or think, as these can be different, critical realism opens up an approach that moves beyond discourse. Critical realism acts as a philosophical under-labourer, providing precepts to guide research and avoids the role of 'master-builder', whereby an ontology is taken to be a definitive map of social facts (Cruickshank, 2003).

Conceptualising authenticity as an emergent phenomenon

Critical realists assert that the world is characterised by emergence, or "situations in which the conjunction of two or more features or aspects gives rise to new phenomena, which have properties which are irreducible to those of their constituents, even though the latter are necessary for their existence" (Sayer, 2000: 12). Bhaskar (1993: 397) defines emergence as "a relationship between two terms such that one term diachronically or perhaps synchronically arises out of the other, but is capable of reacting back on the first and is in any event causally and taxonomically irreducible to

it". Critical realism proposes a stratified social reality (the real, the actual and the empirical) to account for the differences between experiences, events, entities and causes. A Stratified reality means it cannot be conflated upwards or downwards. That is to say, people cannot be reduced to society, nor society to people. Furthermore, social structures, cultural systems and human agents all possess their own emergent properties, which have to be taken into account when analysing social phenomena (Wikgren, 2006). In the case of this thesis, authenticity in hip hop can then be understood as arising from an interaction of social, cultural and economic structures that constrain and enable agents, producing emergent properties. As discussed in the opening chapter, the phenomenon of global hip hop is riven through with creative change, influencing just what is considered authentic in this context. The meta-theoretical perspective of critical realism encourages us to develop an emergent understanding of authenticity. Authenticity is then "not just a term applied in relation to our ideas, beliefs and so on, but is intimately linked with what we actually do as embodied, contextualized, concretely singular individuals" (Wilson, 2013: 9), and how this changes over time. As the world is stratified and emergent, it is always changing, challenging a static conception of authenticity that is somehow bound to a particular formulation or following of outdated 'rules'. Authenticity, one might suggest, can then be conceptualised as an emergent human capacity, (re)produced through situated practices, in a changing world. Instead of being viewed as unchanging essence, this theoretical position suggests authenticity is not fixed but active and dynamic, and reproduced and transformed through human practices.

Conceptualising authenticity as a dialectical phenomenon

Dialectical critical realism (a later development of critical realist theory) provides an account of the relationship between 'being' and 'becoming'. The approach explains change and development and its relationship to structure and agency, which is important in understanding authenticity. Bhaskar (1993) argues that absence, not just presence, affects reality. When something changes, it moves into something else and in that process ceases to be what it was. What it was is not the same anymore, but still exists, so has been 'absented' through the process of change. Norrie (2010: 15) explains, "Every process of becoming involves the determinate absenting of the old in favour of the determination of the new." Bhaskar's concept of 'real absence' accounts for change by arguing that there is an absenting of the old in the emergence of the new. In the case of the London hip hop scene, the 'absenting' of American styles of hip hop brought about localised reinterpretations of hip hop. Dialectical critical realism's emphasis on absence is also useful when considering the complex relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity.

Approaching authenticity from a dialectical critical realist perspective gives us purchase over the inevitable tensions that arise from appropriating an art form and making music in a capitalist context. For example, rappers want to make music that is an expression of themselves yet also produce rap that is sellable so they can earn a living from it. Rather than perhaps seeing the latter as 'inauthentic', critical realism provides a way of overcoming the dualism between the authentic and inauthentic. Instead of viewing them in opposition, they have a dialectical relationship. In hip hop the dialectic helps explain the relationship between the song and rapper, or the individual and collective (so too, rapper versus hip hop authenticity). As such, the approach offers a productive way of looking at how authenticity is lived out in practice.

Conceptualising mechanisms in hip hop

Critical realism makes an important distinction between events and actions, which we can observe in the 'empirical' domain, and underlying causes or 'mechanisms', which are often invisible and operate in what Bhaskar terms the 'real' or 'deep' domain (see Bhaskar, 1978). The social world is not explained purely in terms of the observable actions, practices, patterns etc. that are the stock in trade of empirical realist research, but in reference to underlying generative mechanisms which operate under particular conditions to give rise to specific outcomes (see Pawson and Tilley, 1997). As Collier points out, "If there were a single mechanism only, there would be a naturally closed system, and passive observation would be enough to establish laws (or the law) of nature (except that in such a world, there could be no human observers)" (Collier, 1994: 46). Bhaskar argues, "the predicates 'natural', 'social', 'human', 'physical', 'chemical', 'aerodynamical', 'biological', 'economic', etc. ought not to be regarded as differentiating distinct kinds of events, but as differentiating distinct kinds of mechanisms" (1975: 119). This explanatory framework "acknowledges and incorporates pre-existent structures as generative mechanisms; their interplay with other objects (including other structures) possessing causal powers and liabilities; and non-predictable but none the less explicable outcomes arising from interactions between the above" (Archer, 1998: 377-8). In the context of hip hop, structural mechanisms might include such things as race, class, gender, and geography whilst causal powers and liabilities could include skill level, vocabulary, and access to resources. These mechanisms, combined with human agency, produce effects in the world, which we can try and understand and study despite them being so complex and multilayered. Interconnecting systems, for instance the personal, institutional,

economic, familial, and a plethora of others, make up the social world, each with their own particular generative mechanisms (Houston, 2001). Instead of explaining social phenomena based on empirical observation alone, the researcher must ask 'transfactual' questions that look beyond the event through identifying generative mechanisms that made the event possible (Bhaskar, 1978: 50). In the case of hip hop, these might include technological advances such as the internet, or the impact of commercialisation which was highlighted in the literature review, as they undoubtedly exist but can not been seen directly in a specific space and moment. Whilst structures and generative mechanisms are not readily apparent, they can be observed and experienced through their *effects* (Rees & Gatenby, forthcoming 2014). Thus in combining ethnography with critical realism, I will not observe uncritically, but be informed by my conceptualisation of authenticity which will also include taking into account the context in order to identify the mechanisms at work.

3.3 Ethnography

The research question(s) guiding this research are:

> How do rappers 'live out' authenticity in the London hip hop scene? What does this tell us about:
>
> i) What authenticity is?
>
> ii) The changing context of the London hip hop scene?
>
> iii) The challenges facing young people in contemporary society as they seek to live out authenticity?

As the study is focused on a situated locale, London, and on the 'living out' of authenticity, which refers to everyday life, a methodology that is able to capture this

everydayness is required. A qualitative methodology is the most appropriate because of the explorative nature of the research question. As discussed above, critical realism allows for an understanding of authenticity as social construction, but more than this, as something that exists independently of one's observation of it. My focus on rappers and what 'keepin' it real' means to them and how it is played out in everyday life required adopting a research design that would enable me to observe and talk to artists in the London scene to examine their "social processes, identities and collective practices" (Cohen, 1993: 127), hence I chose ethnography. As Maxwell and Mittapalli (2007) have documented, critical realism is not only compatible with ethnography but also highly productive in conjunction because they share the same goals of understanding social actors' perspectives and meanings as real phenomena. Both employ a process-orientated rather than value-orientated approach to explanation, which emphasises the importance of context for explanation (2007: 5). Combining critical realism with ethnography involves linking rich data collection to various layers of context and social structure, and attempting to *explain* rather than merely describe social phenomena (Watson, 2012). Critical realism as a philosophical under-labourer then explains the underlying 'generative mechanisms' that shape human agency and the social relations that this agency in turn reproduces and transforms (Rees & Gatenby, forthcoming 2014). Thus, it seeks the explanation of events and situations through case studies rather than base explanations on regularities or 'general laws' (Maxwell, 2004a). Below I set out to explain why the qualitative methodology of ethnography, in conjunction with a critical realist framework, is the most appropriate approach for the study of authenticity in the London hip hop scene.

What is ethnography?

Ethnography is about the study of people; their interactions and environment (May, 1993) and relies on first-hand knowledge of social processes gathered in situ by the researcher though participation and observation (Hammersley, 1984) making it an obvious choice for this research. Compared to methods such as surveys and questionnaires and other quantitative methods, ethnography is more able to capture the lived experience of rappers in a hip hop scene and explore the nuances of scene dynamics and relationships. Following Feld (1984), ethnography is arguably the most sophisticated methodology for achieving a subtle and rich analysis of musical cultures that takes into account the embedded and entangled wider cultural, social, political and economic practices. In this thesis, the definition of ethnography I am working with is "a written account of the cultural life of a social group, organisation or community which may focus on a particular aspect of life in that setting" (Watson, 2008a). The cultural life I am studying is the hip hop community in London and the particular aspect of life I am focusing on is authenticity and what 'keeping it real' actually means. Through immersion in the London hip hop scene and by talking to participants I am better able to present the multi-layered social, cultural and political reality of rappers and the practices surrounding authenticity. This is not just by reflecting back directly observable phenomena, but also through careful analysis and theorisation of choices, capacities (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) and other likely causes (mechanisms) giving rise to particular outcomes in particular contexts.

The most appropriate unit of analysis for this research project on authenticity is the individual rapper, because the intention is to focus on the human actor and how they negotiate authenticity in relation to societal structures and conventions. However, the level of analysis also includes the scene (context) as the findings indicate wider trends

and patterns across the group of social actors and perhaps even more widely to the global community of hip hop rappers, known as the hip hop nation (Alim, 2009).

Why ethnography?

Although carrying out ethnographic research follows a certain tradition in popular music studies, there is a surprising dearth of studies on hip hop. There are a few ethnographic studies in global hip hop (Condry, 2006; Dimitriadis, 2009) but most hip hop research, as previously mentioned, is grounded in discourse, textual or historical analysis. What was needed was a methodology that would help to ascertain the extent to which authenticity influences (and in turn is influenced by) the everyday social world of rappers, making investigation of it difficult. It is clear that to understand *why* authenticity matters and *how* it is lived out, we need a grasp of the social context, in order to understand and articulate the complex relationships surrounding it. Ethnography is particularly suitable for investigating sensitive issues because observational research does not intervene in the activities of the people being studied (Alder & Alder, 2000), so can provide rich, detailed descriptions about the little known or difficult to visibly access. As one of the few methods that allows researchers to go out in the 'field' to observe what people do in 'real life' contexts, not just what they say they do, ethnographic participant observation can supply detailed information unattainable by other research methods (Homan, 1991; Gans, 1999). My application of ethnography helps us understand the role of authenticity in rappers' everyday lives, and works towards addressing the normative and value-laden dimensions of authenticity. As Crang & Cook (2007: 14) argue, ethnography engages with, rather than withdraws from, the messiness of the 'real world'. For my particular enquiry, ethnography is arguably most appropriate for obtaining a high level of detail and

context dependent phenomena because immersion in a social milieu allows for close and personal interactions and the ability to hear what informants have to say in their own terms and in their own settings. Clifford (1997) perfectly captures the essence of ethnography, particularly relevant to the study of a music scene, in suggesting it is less a practice of intensive dwelling and more a matter of repeated visiting, collaborative work and 'deep hanging out'.

A significant challenge of studying global hip hop is to resist the tendency of essentialising 'local', 'foreign', or 'global' culture (Condry, 2000). As Cook (2004: 108) notes, by understanding hip hop as originating elsewhere, and mediated by global communications (satellite, film, and the Internet, as well as print media), but produced and signified locally, scholars meet Gupta & Ferguson's (1992: 14) challenge to explore "the processes of production of difference in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interdependent spaces". This focus on the 'production of local differences' calls attention to the political processes through which places and cultures are produced when studying social action (Gille & Riain, 2002). Hip hop is not simply the sum total of its products: its songs (beats and lyrics), dances, music videos and graffiti images. As critical realism holds, phenomena are irreducible to their constitutive parts, despite the latter being necessary for their existence (Sayer, 2000: 12). This is the relationship that makes it possible for a whole (i.e. hip hop) to be more than the sum of its parts (i.e. those structures and agents involved) (see Elder-Vass, 2004: 103). Focusing on the constitutive parts of hip hop in isolation would not give us an informed picture of the lived experience of being a hip hop artist. Cook (2004) argues that "the physical, material, economic, ideological, social, and cognitive dimensions" all affect our interactions, this means they are thus relevant realms to take into account in my research as authenticity is not purely linguistic. Ethnography

allows the researcher to observe nonverbal expressions of feelings, determine who interacts with whom and grasp the relations and communication of participants (Schmuck, 1997). Ethnography is well suited to considering and paying attention to these dimensions and the relationships between them, capturing the multiple identities and stratified nature of the lived experience for rappers.

Strengths and weaknesses of ethnography

Ethnography as a practice holds a range of advantages and disadvantages. Critiques of ethnography have largely emanated from within the natural sciences around issues of reliability and validity (Brewer, 2000). Reliability refers to the replicability of a study meaning a researcher repeating the study using the same method should produce the same results (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). However, these requirements derive from certain assumptions underpinning positivism and experimental research. In qualitative research, it is recognised that objectivity is problematic due to the impossibility of producing unbiased research (Monahan & Fisher, 2010). Nevertheless, researchers can make their studies more reliable by addressing key areas such as researcher reflexivity and how the data was collected and analysed (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Researcher reflexivity is integral to the research process and the methods of data collection and analysis must be clearly presented. This includes reporting sampling strategies and choice of informants, in addition to delineating the analysis process. However stringent the efforts made, it is impossible to demarcate a true "operating manual" for the researcher (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 336). Other options put forward to improve reliability include respondent validation (Brink, 1991) where the results, or whole study, are 'checked' by the respondents; peer debriefing, involving sharing one's analysis and conclusions with a peer or colleague on a continuous basis

to foster credibility (Robson, 1994); and an audit of the decision trail, where details of collection techniques, sources of data, experiences, assumptions made and decisions taken are all presented (Long & Johnson, 2000). Triangulation is one of the most common and effective forms of validation. It involves comparing different types of data and methods, for instance observation and interview, to see whether they corroborate one another (Silverman, 2003). In this thesis I have included an audit trail of the research process and triangulation (involving participant observation and interviews) with the aim of improving the reliability and validity of the study.[14]

Johnson and Sackett (1998) have criticised ethnography for being mere description and an erroneous description at that. They argue that data collected by ethnographers are never representative of the culture but based on the interest of the researcher.[15] Therefore ethnography might tell us more about the ethnographer rather than the culture under study. However, most ethnographers suggest that data cannot be 'uncontaminated' by the researcher and reject the idea that research can be carried out by some autonomous realm that is insulated from wider society and the particular biography of the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As research takes place in the social world, we have to acknowledge that we cannot avoid having an effect on the social phenomena we study. This does not mean that the validity of ethnographic findings is limited to a data set. Rather than engage in futile attempts to wholly eradicate the effects of the researcher, if we understand that the researcher is necessarily an active participant in the research process and make this clear through self-reflexivity, then this aspect of 'doing research' becomes a central and legitimate

[14] In keeping with the critical realist approach taken, the emphasis throughout is on developing convincing causal explanation rather than 'proof' per se.

[15] As Lawson (1997) notes, all research involves abstracting from reality, and is dependent upon the researcher's particular 'vantage point'. Such epistemological relativism is described as one feature of the 'holy trinity' of critical realism (see Bhaskar & Hartwig 2010) – the others being ontological realism and judgmental rationalism.

part of the analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). However, as Macdonald (2001: 69) warns, reflexivity is not simply the influence of the personal identity of the ethnographer on the research but rather the wider business of 'anthropologising' aspects of the ethnographic enterprise itself. In addition to the self-other relationship, the researcher dissects categories and practices, semantics and meaning. As Bulmer states, "qualitative researchers try to achieve validity not through manipulation of variables but rather through their orientation towards, and the study of, the empirical world" (Bulmer, 1979: 49). In summary, producing a "practically adequate" (Sayer, 1992) study involves doing research in a professional and systematic way and stating how the research was conducted in a transparent manner.

'Field' and 'Home'

One of the most important yet challenging tasks of ethnography is identifying or situating the 'field' of study because it is difficult to draw a clear-cut territory to investigate. We live in an increasingly globalised world in which people, places, objects and ideas are constantly shifting at a dramatic rate. As Appadurai (1990: 191) suggests: "The landscapes of group identity – the ethnoscapes – around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious or culturally homogeneous." Therefore locations are not fixed but an ongoing project in fieldwork. The task of my ethnography, especially in relation to a city like London, is to understand the lived experience of this globalised and deterritorialised world.

Ethnography was pioneered in cultural anthropology (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973; Malinowski 1922; Marcus 1998; Mead 1928), where doing fieldwork

traditionally meant physical displacement, as anthropologists researched cultural phenomena and social formations in far-flung areas of the globe. However, more recently there has been a rise in 'home ethnographies', with researchers staying in their own country, or even own city to conduct research (Alvesson, 2009). Rather than focus on the exotic and be "merchants of astonishment", we have an obligation to turn the research gaze on our own locality (Salvador et al., 1999). My research falls under the 'home ethnography' category as I am researching hip hop authenticity in London, which is the city I live and work in.

Doing a home ethnography raises its own set of particular issues and concerns. Van Maanen (1987) warns that it is common for fieldworkers drawn to familiar places to have the slightly ironic intention of making them seem strange. In contrast, others (Bourdieu, 1988, 1990a; Strathern, 1989) have called for more studies of 'our own' cultures to stop taking them as universal benchmarks and problematise their values. Home ethnographies also allow for the deflation of stereotypes and help others to see the place in question with fresh eyes. Due to the complex, hybrid and deterritorialised nature of globalised cities, such as London, it is possible to write about 'out-of-the-way' places without distancing, romanticizing or exoticising them (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). In conducting a home ethnography on London hip hop will potentially enable critiques and resistances that would otherwise not have been articulated (hooks, 1990; Spivak, 1988).

3.4 Fieldwork

Conducting fieldwork always involves observation and can use interviews (Silverman, 2010). Given my project's focus on exploring the lived out nature of authenticity, I

decided to do both, capturing more of the 'everyday' nature of hip hop, and affording the opportunity to triangulate the data collected. Dell Hymes (1981: 84) notes, "Some social research seems incredibly to assume that what there is to be found out can be found out by asking." Hymes is highlighting that most of what we see of research participants' social and cultural behaviour is them performing it without reflecting on it. This is something they *do* without an active awareness that is what they do. As such, it is not an issue they can necessarily put in words when you ask them about it (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). This also ties in closely with Bhaskar's notion of the 'epistemic fallacy', which he identifies as "the analysis or definition of statements about being in terms of statements about our knowledge (of being)" (Bhaskar, 1993: 397). As my research is aimed at understanding how authenticity is lived out in the context of rappers' everyday lives, taking into account both conscious deliberations and discourses of authenticity and aspects that perhaps rappers are themselves unaware of, only asking directly about the concept will not suffice.

Music scenes can be considered local, translocal, or virtual (Bennett & Peterson, 2004) so although an ethnography of a situated music scene is local in terms of geography, other global, virtual, economic and cultural factors impinge and influence the scene too. According to Kirschner (1998: 258), many "territorially bound ethnographies…fail to link intimate accounts of local practices to the bigger picture, reducing complex flows of popular culture to a sort of local determinism." In the context of the London hip hop scene there is a clear interplay between global and local hip hop culture. Rappers in the London scene are local agents in that they live and work in a territorially bound locale but they also are global participants and consumers, negotiating complex flows of hip hop and other forms of culture. Therefore when analysing the data, it is important to take into account the global, translocal, and also

the market pressures of capitalism, which influence day-to-day existence, music-making and other local practices. A more in-depth description of the scene that maps out its social, cultural, and economic context, and provides an overview of hip hop in London can be found in the next chapter. Below, I discuss how I carried out the participant observation and interviews.

Participant observation

Observation and participation are widely considered the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Atkinson et al., 2001). To be a 'participant' in a culture implies the immersion of the researcher into the everyday activities of the community (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011); while 'observer' implies a detached watcher of activities unfolding (Fyfe, 1992). Following Crang & Cook (2007: 37), participant observation is not the separation of 'subjective' and 'objective' components, but a means of developing inter-subjective understandings between researcher and researched. As Crang and Cook (2007) point out, this includes thinking about the other communities outside (in this case hip hop) that scene participants, in addition to the researcher, are immersed in. These outside communities, such as family, geopolitics, music industries, institutions, and the media, alongside ideological and aesthetic strategies, underpin music-making (Stahl, 2004: 52). It is imperative to take into account the wider context in which this research is taking place, especially when considering how authenticity is lived out in everyday life and the various forces imposed from inside and outside the scene.

After receiving ethical approval, I built up a database list detailing rappers performing in London and regular gigs and events taking place by checking online gig listings and

social networking sites. I joined groups on Facebook such as 'UK Hip Hop' where members posted information and live event notifications; in addition, I signed up to artist mailing lists so I could hear of upcoming gigs. As mentioned above, gigs were not as regular as I first envisaged. I thought there would be something on every night but there were often periods of little activity and then a flurry of many shows in a week or couple of weeks. Over the course of 14 months of fieldwork, I attended 65 events which were mostly live shows but also included a few hip hop debates, panels and seminars that rappers were speaking at. All the events I attended were places open to the public, so they did not involve covert research, although some of the interviews took place at the home of the interviewee at their request. The underground nature of the scene meant all the gigs occurred at small bars, pubs or clubs and no big venues like the O2 arena or Earl's Court. I was able to participate in some events more than others. This did not involve performing on stage and rapping, neither was it a question of sitting in a corner taking notes. I was an active audience member, cheering and applauding as I felt I wanted to, talking to musicians after their performance, getting business cards from artists or buying CDs from them, as well conducting informal interviews with people during the breaks in the show and/or afterwards.

Fieldnotes, the traditional means of recording observational data in ethnography, produce written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of the social world under study to others. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995: 179) argue that it is difficult to overemphasise the importance of meticulous note-taking and a good maxim to follow is "if in doubt, write it down". However, they also emphasise the impossibility of being able to record everything. When writing fieldnotes, the ethnographer has to make choices about what to select and emphasise while marginalising or ignoring other facets (Emerson et al., 2011). In the early stages of fieldwork, the scope of my

notes was fairly wide, but as my research progressed what was 'significant' changed (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001: 353), focusing my attention on the concept of lived out authenticity. Many ethnographers have noted the importance of taking notes daily, or at least immediately after particular events, as it will quickly fade from memory or become incoherent and muddled (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Jackson, 1990). Following this guidance, as soon as possible after each event, even if it was 3am after getting in from a gig, or scribbling on the night bus home, I wrote up my fieldnotes to record my observations. I sought to include as much as possible including the basic information about the venue, number and demographics of people in attendance, atmosphere, the music, lyrics (if I could make them out), conversations, and so on. I usually then included a further section of what could be called a 'meta commentary'[16] consisting of thoughts that had occurred to me, emotional reactions, a piece of literature that sprung to mind, or questions to bring up at an interview (Emerson et al., 2001). It is important to note that fieldnotes cannot possibly provide a 'complete' record of the research setting (Atkinson, 1992: 17) and that the ethnographer acquires considerably more tacit knowledge than can ever be contained in the written record (Wolfinger, 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Interviews

Along with participant observation, interviewing is a primary means through which ethnographic researchers attempt to get to grips with the everyday social, cultural, political, and economic lives of their participants (Crang & Cook, 2011). In total I

[16] This is my own term for the commentary – other ethnographers have slightly different labels for it. For instance: *Asides* (Emerson et al., 2001: 362); *theoretical notes* to be labeled 'TN' in contrast to observational notes (ON) (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973: 100); *commentary* and *in-process memo* (Emerson et al., 2001).

conducted 21 interviews with 19 artists, of whom one was female. All 21 interviews were recorded on an audio recorder and later transcribed verbatim. The interviews ranged from 1 hour to 3.5 hours and produced approximately 45 hours of recorded interview material. The interviews were one-to-one, semi-structured and open-ended to gain rich, detailed data directly from participants in the social world under study (Sherman-Heyl, 2001). As Spradley notes in *The Ethnographic Interview*, "The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand" (1979: 5). Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth discussions about hip hop and provided the opportunity for artists to disclose personal experiences and thoughts on UK hip hop and the London scene. Interviews can be problematic, however. As Negus has commented, interviews are not about 'extracting' information but are an 'active social encounter' through which knowledge is produced via a process of exchange, which involves "communication, interpretation, understanding, and, occasionally perhaps, misunderstanding" (1999: 11). It is therefore important for the interviewer to keep some goals in mind: "listen well and respectfully…acquire a self awareness of our role in the co-construction of meaning during the interview process; be cognizant of the ways in which both the ongoing relationship and the broader social context affect the participants, the interview process, and the project outcomes" (Sherman Heyl, 2001: 370).

Semi-structured interviews proved to be key for engaging directly with rappers and understanding how they conceptualise, navigate and live out authenticity in London, as well as their experiences of it through their respective practices. The open-ended nature of the interview allowed for a conversation-like interchange, but also provided a forum for interviewees to question me about my intentions, motivations, biases and impressions (Mbaye, 2011). I initially planned to take notes during interviews to write

down thoughts that sprung to mind while the informant spoke or questions to return to later so not needing to interrupt the informant. However I soon realised it did not seem appropriate and it made the informant uncomfortable, not lending itself to the notion of the interview being an informal conversation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As "an interview is contextual and negotiated" (Charmaz, 2006: 27), each one is different and requires the interviewer to be flexible and accommodate the contingencies of each conversation. In some cases the interviewees would go off at seemingly long tangents but I tried to steer the conversation as little as possible, to let the information and ideas emerge freely as what they said might appear irrelevant but could actually be highly significant when transcribing and analysing later on. This tactic attempted to minimise my influence as a researcher but as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out, some structuring is necessary. A topic that kept reoccurring in interviews was the lack of earning potential in UK hip hop and the difficulty to make money from one's music. At first I did not see the significance of this to authenticity, but it was only after conducting several interviews and every single respondent bringing it up that I realised that the sense of struggle to make ends meet was key to the lived out nature of authenticity. The economic side of life is deeply embedded with the social and cultural so extremely pertinent to how authenticity is lived out on a day-to-day basis. But also I realised these complaints may incorporate an element of "impression management" (Goffman, 1959) on the part of the rappers to emphasise their underground status.

The majority of the 21 interviews conducted during my fieldwork period of 14 months were conducted over the summer of 2012. Making initial contact was surprisingly easy as most people replied to emails and Facebook messages, even some that I considered more 'high profile' who might have someone managing their social

networks for them. On a few occasions, I would see an artist perform and then talk to them afterwards to arrange an interview. Overall, I contacted 38 artists to be interviewed but in the end only managed to interview 19 (see interview schedule Appendix B). This was due to a variety of reasons. As already mentioned, access was not an issue as rappers were usually more than happy to give interviews, and some of the more well-known artists were used to giving interviews for magazines and blogs. Some rappers sent back polite responses informing me they were busy and could not make the time, while others never replied at all, despite several follow-up emails. Occasionally I had long email exchanges back and forth but when I attempted to confirm a time and date, the rapper ceased communication. However, luckily this happened only a few times.

I spent a considerable amount of time preparing for each interview, finding out as much as I could about each artist. I scoured their social network sites, listened to their music, read their lyrics, made copious notes, and most importantly tried to see them perform live beforehand if possible. With the first few interviews, I realised I had not done my homework properly when an artist talked about a time he felt very low and had attempted to commit suicide. I, of course, expressed my shock and empathy, only to find that his first album largely dealt with this difficult period of his life and it became clearly apparent to him that I had not listened to it. After this, I tried to be as well prepared as possible by thoroughly engaging with respondents' music and thinking of questions which tried to communicate I was a serious researcher but also a 'hip hop head' they could take seriously. This approach worked quite well and most artists were flattered that I had taken the time to ask specific questions about their work or lyrics or could talk in an informed way about their oeuvre.

Interview questions

I prepared a rough list of open-ended questions to ask in each interview based on preliminary research into the artist, questions that arose from participant observation (Murphy, 1999), in addition to more specific questions brought up in the literature review around the themes of keeping it real, race, class, the internet, American rap and scene dynamics. I always started off with a general question such as 'how did you get into hip hop' or 'when did you start rapping' to get them talking and build rapport before launching into more serious questions as Leech (2002) advises. The questions were very much meant to be a guide, rather than an exhaustive list to work through (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). After a few interviews, I knew the questions off the top of my head and so did not need a prompt anyway. On two occasions, two rappers asked to see the questions before agreeing to be interviewed. Each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) in line with my university's ethical rules.

Sin (2003: 306) has argued, "writings on the theory and practice of interviewing have largely neglected the specifics of settings and activities". I am thus including a discussion of place in the acknowledgement that various facets of people's identities are immersed in between different spaces and places in their lives (Crang & Cook, 2007). Interviews were conducted in and around London, except for one that was held in Brighton at the request of the rapper. Choosing a locale is not always easy and several considerations have to be borne in mind (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). To encourage rappers to agree to be interviewed and because I had no payment or incentive for them to assist me in my research, I always offered to meet somewhere convenient to them, and usually bought them a drink (tea/coffee or beverage if at bar).

Although I could have held interviews at my university, it would have been inappropriate and rappers may have felt uncomfortable. Plus, it adds a certain formality to the interviews whereas I wanted the rappers to feel at ease and not as though we were on my 'territory' (Lyman & Scott, 1970). The interviews occurred at all times of the day, depending on the availability of the rapper. Most were carried out at a café or pub with three taking place in a park due to sunny weather, and the most successful interview took place on a stairwell.

Sampling

The selection of interviewees was purposive (McWillan & Wergin, 2010), as I wanted to talk to identifiable key agents in the scene, who performed regularly, had significant fan bases and had been members of the scene for a while. As the research progressed, I aimed to get artists across the professional spectrum, from ones that are considered more 'famous' (albeit at an underground level) to more amateur ones just starting out. This would help to give a sense of authenticity's role at different stages of a rapper's career. I used some of my personal connections of friends in the scene to introduce me to various rappers, and later used 'snowballing' (Patton, 2002) whereby an interviewee would recommend or suggest someone they knew to talk to. In terms of the sample size, as mentioned above, I set out to do more interviews but it got to the stage where I had to ask myself how many interviews are enough (Crang & Cook, 2007)? I stopped when I realised I could go on indefinitely but not yield significantly more data due to more or less reaching saturation point (Ortiz, 2003) with artists saying similar things. Admittedly time and financial restraints played a part too, which should not be downplayed, as it can be a determining factor of research but not always acknowledged (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Ethical considerations

In accordance with King's College London's ethical requirement, to gain approval I submitted a detailed form on how the research was to be carried out, in addition to a recruitment letter for participants, an information sheet, consent form, risk checklist and interview questions. The proposed research satisfied the stringent requirements set by the university and I was awarded full ethical approval in June 2011. The information sheet (see Appendix C) was designed to give participants a clear picture of what the study was about and indicate they could withdraw at any time up to a certain cut-off point that was the end of 2012. All interviewees were asked to read and sign a form consenting to the use of their data. I gave all interviewees the option of confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms so their identity would not be revealed without their permission but everyone wanted their rap name to be used except for one person. Although most of the interviewees did not ask to be anonymised, in some cases the data appeared quite personal or controversial, so I made the decision to anonymise them to protect their privacy (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 267). Also, many rappers requested to read my finished thesis so in the interests of respecting peoples' confidentiality, and because I did not want to portray anyone in a negative light, especially because the informants mostly know one another, I have anonymised particular quotes by just writing 'one rapper stated…', rather than providing a name.

In addition to the research ethics that Crang & Cook (2007: 31) label Ethics with a capital 'E' - that shape our plans and research proposals for ethical reviews - is ethics with a lower case 'e', which emerge from the smaller encounters and ties with people in fieldwork. These are the messy, continually updated set of ethics that develop over

time and are the result of researchers being inextricably linked socially and politically to their site of study because of being implicated in a field of contested relations (Heath et al. 1999). Ethnography is not neutral, in the sense that numerous choices and restrictions reside in social processes and interactions (Van Maanen, 1987). Ethical considerations need to be attended to as informants might reveal a certain degree of information or exhibit interpersonal intimacy (Allen, 1996), which can result in reified dualisms between 'us' and 'them' (Ginsburg, 1994). However, the closeness and understanding gained from relationships with informants is also the strength of ethnography too because one can attend to the unequal fields of power and the diverse social, technical and political contexts where relations take shape (Heath et al., 1999). Although one of the perceived assets of ethnography is observing phenomena in its most natural state, there is the recognition that just by being present, the researcher is affecting the situation, and that 'facts' necessarily contain biases (Sanjek, 1990). It is therefore important as an ethnographer to maintain accountability throughout fieldwork and map out responsibilities. It is significant to note the particular sensitivity of my study, which is about 'authenticity', which may up the ante somewhat for participating rappers. Interviewees were asked to comment on something they might otherwise want taken for granted, lest they appear inauthentic. Furthermore, interviewees may succumb to social desirability and tell the researcher what they think she or he wants to hear. This does not mean the data is worthless and you cannot trust what people say but rather the need to incorporate this reflexivity into the data analysis process, as well as look at a range of social interactions and positioned actors. Reflexivity plays an important part in ethics and so ethnographers must take note of ethical aspects of their work and make the best judgments in the given circumstances (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 286; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

3.5 Researcher reflexivity and positionality

Researcher reflexivity is an "attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts recognise that the construction of knowledge takes place in the world and not apart from it" (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998: 6). Following Shank (1994), I hold that no cultural description can be neutral. This aligns with critical realism, which posits an objectively existing world, though does not suggest that this world can be known in its entirety. Furthermore, a key characteristic of critical realism is its embracing of epistemological relativism (Bhaskar, 1993). What we are able to 'know' depends to some extent on our individual vantage point – as individuals, researchers, hip hop fans, and so on. As Denzin and Lincoln argue, "there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and observed" as "any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (1994: 25). Every representation is from a particular limited perspective, which produces its own effects; therefore ethnography requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher. This involves "thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognising the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape your research and what you see" (Mason, 2002: 5). Following the tradition of reflexivity in ethnographic research, this section includes a reflexive account of myself as a critical realist researcher and the various factors that could have impacted the study, and therefore tries to acknowledge the limitations of the research. Firstly I address the feeling of being both an insider *and* an outsider, then I discuss issues around gender, age and race.

Insider/outsider

When starting this research, I considered myself somewhat of an insider due to my long-term involvement in hip hop from my teenage years and my contacts still in the scene. This notion corresponds with Hodkinson's (2005: 131) definition of insider researchers as "investigators with some degree of initial cultural proximity to the individuals or cultures under the microscope". However, he does highlight that the complexity of being both researcher and researched make the notion of being absolute insider (or outsider) problematic (2005: 132). Approaching this research as a hip hop fan has its own set of advantages and disadvantages, with consequences for my conceptual understanding of authenticity. Although enjoying cultural proximity with the group under study, I quickly realised I was not an insider for various reasons. Although I had considerable knowledge of hip hop and key artists, as well as friends in the scene, it became apparent just being a 'fan' and not being able to rap or DJ limited my insider status in the scene because I did not practice or 'do' hip hop. To some extent, this hindered me from fully participating in the scene and forming close relationships with rappers, as I did not know what it was like to write raps, perform on stage and be part of a crew. In addition, being white and female made me an outsider too because the scene is so male dominated and ethnically diverse. On account of my blurred position as both insider and outsider, I could move from one position to the other, which arguably helped my research by being able to adjust according to whom I was talking to and what I was doing.

Grappling with the issues around being an insider or an outsider were key to my study's focus on authenticity, as I had to consider my own authentic status in the

scene. To what extent was I trying to be 'accepted' in order to gain trust and access to key artists? Or might it be beneficial to keep some distance to maintain a 'researcher' identity? On several occasions it felt as though my insider status was being tested and challenged by scene participants. For instance, when talking with or interviewing artists, many dropped names of obscure rappers and albums into conversation and asked whether I had heard of them. If I had, they evidently showed a little more respect for me, and if I had not, they expressed disbelief and enjoyed asserting their superior cultural knowledge. Another reoccurring tension was around drink and drugs as they are so prevalent in the scene. I was repeatedly faced with the dilemma of to what extent I should 'go native' or whether to hold back and retain my researcher identity. In some cases the choice was fairly unproblematic. For example at one gig, a rapper called Stig of the Dump had just come off stage and went outside to smoke. He was momentarily standing alone so I seized the chance to go and speak to him. We got talking and he pulled out a little bottle of whisky from his pocket and offered me a swig then presented me with a cigarette from his packet. He kept offering them to me during our conversation. I accepted both even though I do not smoke and I am not particularly keen on whisky either. We ended up talking for nearly an hour and missing most of the live show. If I had firmly said 'no', would he have been so responsive and chatty? Drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes I felt did not compromise my integrity and so did not present itself as a challenging predicament. However on another occasion I was offered a few lines of cocaine by a DJ in the scene but did say "no". As a researcher I hold it important to be non-judgmental and unprejudiced about research participants' illegal exploits, especially because for some it is a regular and fixed part of their day-to-day existence (evidenced by one rapper producing a pipe packed with weed, which he proceeded to smoke in a pub beer garden while I interviewed him), and is exactly what I am trying to gain an insider's

view of. Following Hammersley & Atkinson (1995: 285), ethical considerations cannot be satisfactorily resolved by appeal to absolute rules, and the effective pursuit of research should be the ethnographer's main concern. However, there are limits as the researcher is not immune from sanction, which leaves a difficult moral question. For instance, a researcher cannot or should not remain neutral if a serious crime is revealed to them in the course of a conversation. There can therefore be serious questions for researchers to grapple with, not least avoiding taking the moral high ground or treating interviewees as merely 'data' to be collected.

Being an insider holds certain benefits such as granting a degree of trust and cooperation (Agar, 1996: 105) that is conducive to an open conversation and willingness to disclose (Hodkinson, 2005). This helps in moving away from a question and answer format to more of a two-way exchange and conversational flow (Armstrong, 1993). In addition, having experienced previous proximity with the community of research can result in the ethnographer being able to demonstrate 'cultural competence' in specific spaces and in communicating with others (Hodkinson, 2005). In my case, feeling both included and excluded meant I could navigate both positions when necessary, for example negotiating the 'expert' and 'naïve' roles according to the situation I found myself in. Feeling somewhat of an outsider allowed me to critically evaluate certain people and practices, which perhaps feeling as though I was 'one of them' might not have afforded. A challenge of being considered an insider is that although one has a knowledge base, one has to be careful not to operate on the level of assumptions. I therefore considered it good practice to question or ask for clarification even if I thought I knew what people were referring to or cultural references rappers made. Hodkinson (2005: 140) warns that being an 'insider' can sometimes pressurise respondents to give particular responses consistent

with the community's collective ideologies. However, as I was not well known in the scene, interviewees seemed to trust me and my impression was that they were honest and did not intentionally provide answers to convey a particular image to display membership to the scene. If they did give those types of answers, I contend it was because they genuinely believed that and felt an intense feeling of collective identity.

Social location (race/class/gender)

Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware of and acknowledge how her role can influence the research process, data collection and interpretation (Jones et al 1997). This includes the extent to which social location and similarities or differences between researcher and researched, in characteristics such as race, class and gender, impact the nature and structure of research relationships (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Song & Parker, 2005). My social positionality as a young, white, middle-class, heterosexual female, affected the research so I needed to take into account certain partiality and biases of who I researched, and myself, which may have affected research relationships.

The London hip hop scene is extremely male dominated, which had implications for me as a female researcher. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) have argued that male and female researchers innately have access to different information because of contact with different people, settings and bodies of knowledge. Frequently I was one of only a few females present at a gig. Some members of the scene were very receptive to having more women involved whereas others seemed to not take women very seriously. For instance, at one show a female DJ accompanying a rapper was interpreted as purely a 'gimmick' because female DJs are so rare. On the other hand,

as a female researcher I became quite a novelty and this was met with friendliness. In contrast to some fieldworkers' experiences of gender barring them from certain situations and activities (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), I found being female was an advantage because male rappers were more responsive. It is possible they were more open and honest with a female researcher because I was deemed harmless and not perceived as competition so they did not need to demonstrate a strong bravado and masculine edge in their demeanour.

Conducting an ethnography of a music scene whilst being in my twenties was a big advantage as I was close in age to most scene participants, which afforded me a level of affinity with respondents. On a practical level, not looking old, I could attend gigs and not stand out or look like a researcher, thus blending in. On a more personable level, respondents could relate to me, and I to them. We shared many characteristics because of age; such as the music we grew up listening to, common cultural reference points and local knowledge. I was unintimidating and tried to come across as non-judgemental as possible. Also, I was able to share and discuss relevant anecdotes and observations related to hip hop (Hodkinson, 2005). If a middle-aged professor conducted the interviews, the data collected might have been quite different.

Race was a further significant issue. Some authors have highlighted the problems a white researcher might encounter when studying a black population. Lawrence (1981) for instance has shown that white people might struggle to understand and empathise the experience of being black, and Song and Parker (1995) have argued that qualitative researchers of different ethnic backgrounds will elicit different responses from the same respondents asking the same questions. Differing groups might also be concerned about how they are represented by the 'other' or privileged so issues

around how the 'data' will be circulated and might impact their lives needs to be taken into account. As a white and middle-class researcher I was often working in a context of unequal power relations. In an attempt to counter misunderstandings or misconceptions of (black, Asian, working-class, male) people, I tried to work 'with', rather than 'on' the hip hop community, framing my research around what they chose to share with me and what was important to them (Crang & Cook, 2007). I was transparent about my research intentions and also offered respondents the option to read my thesis or interview transcript and as stated on my consent form, participants were free to pull out of the study before a certain date.

This section sought to address issues surrounding my positionality as researcher and the impact it may have on the data with the aim of being reflexive about the research processes and outcomes. There are clearly many more influences that have shaped my research, but the attempt has been to discuss the more pertinent ones that specifically relate to the issues I have been contending with. Scholarly research comes with a pressure to be 'authoritative'; to defend the originality and validity of our contributions to knowledge, but it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these claims with transparency (Mauthner & Doucet, 2004: 423). In a bid to further enhance being a reflexive researcher, the final section of this chapter documents how I analysed the research in an attempt to create some transparency around a process, which can be glossed over or not discussed at all (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

3.6 Analysis

Following Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), analysis of data is not a distinct stage of research but continually taking place along the research process. As a critical realist

researcher, it was important to (re-)conceptualise the object of study, i.e., authenticity. This requires trying to "work out what is necessarily the case about" authenticity in order for it to exist (Sayer, 2001). Arguably it begins at the pre-fieldwork phase in the formulation of research questions, reviewing the literature, writing notes, reviews and surveys, to the writing of fieldnotes and also in the hunches of the ethnographer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 205). Thus in many ways, analysis feeds into the research design and data collection as "ethnographic research necessarily involves following up leads, adapting to contingencies, and (re)designing research 'on the hoof'" (Crang & Cook, 2007: 131). The concurrent data collection and analysis can generate emerging understanding about research questions, which in turn informs sampling, interview questions and so on and ultimately signal saturation when data collection in complete (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In my research, the interactive relationship between data collection and analysis took the shape of adapting my initial ideas to accommodate the focus on industry and creative labour as it arose as a pressing issue. A lot of research does not detail the process of analysis (Bringer et al., 2004: 253; Agar, 1980) but many scholars have argued for the importance of accountability and transparency of analysis (Rennie, 1998; Crang, 2001; Bailey et al., 1999) so I provide an account here.

The data collected for this thesis was in multiple forms including hand-written fieldnotes, typed transcripts, music videos, song lyrics, images, flyers, newspaper articles, a research diary, plus data gleaned from social-networking sites like status updates, event information and photographs (some of which are included in my findings chapters). However, as Burgess (1984) comments, data merely provide the basis for analysis, they do not dictate it. Ethnographic data is 'unstructured' in the sense it is not structured into an existing set of categories or classifications determined

by the researcher as in the case of most survey data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It is therefore up to the researcher to make sense of the open-ended data collected in order to develop analytic categories (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Firstly I indexed all the data (Crang & Cook, 2007), which involved printing hard copies of everything (except, of course, music videos etc.) and numbering pages and also lines in the case of interviews. Although there is a range of computer software available for the purposes of data storage and analysis, I decided to do it by hand. As ethnographic research yields a considerable amount of data, I can see the benefit of software packages in managing a huge data set but not in the analysis. Some scholars have argued the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software leads to homogenisation because of "a danger that researchers may be led implicitly towards the uncritical adoption of a particular set of strategies" (Coffey et al., 1996: 7.4). In contrast, my reasons for not using it were mostly practical. Most of my fieldnotes were not typed and would have taken an extremely long time to transcribe. I was also concerned I would lose some of the 'rawness' because of scrawling in various notebooks and on the back of bus tickets and receipts. However, if I were to do my research again I would type them up for ease of data formatting and management and also legibility. I decided to analyse by hand which although labour intensive does ensure close readings and familiarity with the text (Basit, 2003).

When I first turned to the primary materials and texts to work on, I engaged in a rudimentary process of coding or what Strauss (1987) calls 'open coding' whereby in the margin of the text the researcher writes down the meaning of statements, or words that describe events and what I think is being said. Then I wrote more in-depth annotations, which I coded again. Codes are labels or tags that allocate units of meaning to descriptive data compiled during a study (Basit, 2003). The codes I listed

were attached either to single words, sentences, chunks of texts, phrases or whole paragraphs and were simplistic to begin with, for instance: ageing, nostalgia, braggadocio, slang, craft, place and so on. Lots of these codes were not distinct or mutually exclusive so I grouped together similar examples and commonalities of phenomena into larger categories (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). The categories I developed were colour coordinated throughout the primary materials through the use of coloured pens and highlighters (see photos in Appendix D). These categories could be assigned to a line, an interview quote or a whole segment of text and multiple codes could be assigned to each (Crang & Cook, 2007). As Basit (2003: 144) argues creating categories triggers the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data. The scheme allowed me to ask questions about the data, compare across the data set and change or drop categories and put them in an order of seeming significance.

On separate sheets of paper I wrote down broad themes that emerged, which were several so I amalgamated many into other themes. It was very hard to place quite a few into themes because it became apparent that the data was characterised by overarching tensions regarding rapper authenticity. Rather than try and fit things under particular categories and themes, I made headings that encapsulated the tension for example, business versus creativity under which the categories of work, payment, industry, writing lyrics, record labels and so on came. This category eventually morphed into 'making music versus making money' that comprises part of the empirical data in Chapter 5. From establishing themes and categories, I moved on to making sense of how it all fits together, noting patterns and trends by connecting relevant sections with other similar cases (Jackson, 2001). Throughout this process, I kept a notebook and wrote 'theoretical notes' (Strauss, 1987) to write down insights, hunches, and ideas around my codes, categories and themes and explanations of them.

The notebook also serves as a 'paper trail' to show I have been logically consistent and provides working notes on decisions made, what was abandoned and changed, and how I reached my conclusions (Crang & Cook, 2007).

Analysing the data qualitatively and also manually offers a close reading and more nuanced way of treating the empirical data. The themes that structure the following three empirical chapters emerged from the data, were informed by the literature, research question and problem, and based on the critical realist meta-theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). One of the advantages of the critical realist approach is its attention on what people do as well as say, as there can be a difference, which is not attended to in discourse analysis. The way the data has been analysed also attends to the historical specificity, variable, and emergent experience of rappers in a particular locale.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological underpinnings that guided the research design of the study. Employing critical realism as an under-labourer emphasised the need to conceptualise the object of study and the importance of taking into account the situated context of rappers in London. Based on the critical realist perspective, authenticity was conceptualised as dialectical and emergent. I then discussed the choice of ethnography as the methodology most suitable to investigate the research question, and its compatibility with critical realism. In addition, the various challenges and advantages of ethnography were addressed. In collecting data through both participant observation and interviews, I sought more validity and reliability through triangulation. Also, by employing both data collection methods, the capacity to

provide a richer account of the lived out nature of authenticity is enhanced because of highlighting broader issues that might affect rappers in the scene such as personal circumstances, socio-economic background, peer relationships in the scene and specific music-making practices. The ethical considerations I contended with were outlined, followed by a section on researcher reflexivity that sought to position myself in relation to the study at hand. Through the process of data analysis, I uncovered the central components needed to understand authenticity in the London hip hop scene: the importance of context and its changing nature (Chapter 4); the ongoing sense of struggle that underpins modern life for rappers which makes 'keepin' it real' profoundly challenging (Chapter 5); and the strategies that rappers have developed to negotiate these struggles and live out authenticity (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER 4

Setting the Scene: Changing Context

> What does it mean to 'keep it real' anymore? What does it mean to be true to something when that something has changed? Can one preserve any kind of individual agency or does one have to ride with the flow of exploitation?
>
> Jeff Chang (2005: 474)

> I travelled the world 10 times and all I seen is pain
> Come back home to find nothing but my peeps in vain
> Feels different even though I know the streets the same
> Seeing faces change you know they're trying to do is beat the game
>
> Steady grind, sitting tight reminiscing about the better days
> I'm pretty tired of being a slave to what the letter says
> It's time for change; make way for the truth now
> It's time for you to feel the pain of youth now
>
> 'Frosted Perspeks' lyrics by Foreign Beggars[17]

4.1 Introduction

To begin the data analysis that comprises the empirical chapters, it is helpful to place the hip hop scene under question in context. Much of the data generated from my study has revolved around how the scene has changed over time. This encompasses the factors fundamentally altering how music is produced and consumed, scene dynamics and how participants interact, and the ways in which these are linked to authenticity. The scene has experienced various peaks and troughs but is widely considered to be currently enjoying a resurgence, which will be discussed in further detail towards the end of the chapter. The interrelated effects of migration, globalisation, capitalism and digitisation have irrevocably influenced London as a distinctive site of cultural production. These macro-level processes, identified in the data analysis and based on theorisation from the literature review, have ongoing

[17] 'Frosted Perspeks' lyrics by Foreign Beggars from album *Asylum Speakers* (released 2003) http://www.hiphopinenglish.com/lyrics/foreign-beggars-feat-lena-frosted-perspeks/

repercussions for the structures, institutions, conventions, socio-economics and human agency that underpin cultural life. In structuring this chapter according to the four key processes of change (though they are of course interrelated), I attempt to map out the historical context of the London hip hop scene and delineate its impact on the lived out nature of authenticity. Firstly I provide an account of how migration and the growing cosmopolitan population of London has impacted the city, forging distinct musical influences and a range of UK hip hop participants. Then I discuss the effects of globalisation on London-based hip hop and the ongoing interplay between the UK and USA. Following this I suggest the forces of marketisation under capitalism are creating greater distinctions between mainstream and underground, with authenticity increasingly linked to some notion of being underground. Next, the effects of the decline of vinyl and the growth of digitisation are discussed, with an analysis of how group dynamics have been impacted. Lastly I consider how all these factors play out in the London hip hop scene as it stands now.

I argue that the changing context of contemporary London makes it a difficult and complex place to live and make sense of, let alone 'keep it real' in. Much of this struggle to live out authenticity is characterised in the tension between 'rapper authenticity' (personal expression) and 'hip hop authenticity' (community convention). Arguably, the unstable and evolving conditions of the scene has placed an emphasis on authenticity, making it a significant concern and preoccupation for rappers.

4.2 Migration and ethnic diversity

In the last fifty years, Britain has experienced substantial change in terms of its cultural and social backdrop. Successive waves of immigration following the Second

World War have resulted in the ethnic mix of Britain diversifying extensively. Migrants from Jamaica, Trinidad and other places in the West Indies, along with those from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh arrived between the 1950s and 1960s (Vertovec, 2006). London's ethnic population increased dramatically in particular, through natural change propelled by high fertility as well as continued immigration, making it a global cosmopolitan city (Stillwell, 2010). London has been described as characterising "super-diversity", a term coined by Vertovec (2006) to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. According to the 2011 Census, the population of London is 8.17 million, making it the most populous city in Europe.[18] It is also one of the world's most ethnically diverse cities as 50 non-indigenous groups have populations over 10,000 and one in three people were born in a foreign country.[19] These shifts in migration, along with advances in technology and media, neoliberal political and economic agendas and globalisation, have arguably made London an exceptional space as a cultural and musical hub. The unique position of London in terms of its geography, population, ethnic mix and diasporic influences, all contribute to the city being a hotbed of musical styles and scenes that impact cultural and creative labour, and certainly hip hop artists. Reflecting the cultural and ethnic diversity of London, UK hip hop is multi-racial and cross-class, although that was not always the case.

The migration of Jamaicans to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s to fill labour shortages arguably had significant repercussions on the development of hip hop in London. In addition to their skill set, Jamaicans brought knowledge of sound system culture and

[18] Office for National Statistics Census 2012 http://www.ons.gov.uk/

[19] By contrast, the figure is one in 20 in the northeast of England. 'Census Data Released' *The Guardian* 11th December 2012.

the vocal accompaniment of 'toasting'[20] with them (Hebdige, 1987). The impact and influence of Jamaican sound system culture is still being discussed and debated today. For instance, an event at the Roundhouse in Camden in 2012[21] discussed the cultural implications of what is termed 'bass music' on British music. When hip hop reached Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s through imported records and films, ethnic minorities and diasporic youth in London were quick to embrace and adopt the culture as a medium of self expression and identity formation against a background of racism, growing unemployment, Thatcherism, and for many, the harsh economic reality of everyday life (Wood, 2009). As Back (1996: 234) suggests, hip hop demonstrates a disaporic sensitivity and offers space for identity exploration because it is simultaneously local, national and transnational, allowing for politics of race and nation to be claimed and redefined by young people. Combining their love and culture of sound systems, in the 1980s the group London Posse merged their reggae musical influences with hip hop beats and breaks[22], and rapped in both cockney and patois. The lead rapper Rodney P said that following the philosophy of reggae crews he admired in London his group realised, "We're not Jamaican. We're English born, with Jamaican heritage and we are going to do it in a different style" (Wood, 2009: 180). Songs such as 'Original London Style' and 'How's life in London?' forged an English and a specifically black British identity through depicting London street life that was different to the dominant mass culture.

[20] Toasting began when DJs would 'toast' over music they played with simple slogans to encourage dancing. These included slogans such as "Work it, Work it" and "Move it up". As toasting became more popular, so too did the length and complexity of the toast. Toasters would speak in time to the beat and is seen as an early form of rapping (Rhodes, 1993).

[21] 'Bass Culture: The Influence of Reggae on British Music' Panel discussion at the Roundhouse, Camden 15th February 2012.

[22] See Appendix A for Glossary of Hip Hop Terms and definition of beats and breaks.

By the early nineties, hip hop in the UK was still largely the preserve of Black Britons and ethnic minorities but with the success of American rap gaining mainstream coverage and selling out gigs at venues like Brixton Academy, different types of people began to take an interest and consider practising the culture themselves. Rapper Efeks recollects attending a gig in the relatively early days of hip hop in London and being in the minority, "I remember right back in '93, I think it was, I saw Dre and Snoop at Brixton Academy and I was one of the only white people there." Chester P also remembers the lack of white participants in UK hip hop:

> At one point when I came into British hip hop, there were no white people. It was just me, Skinny and my brother[23] and a guy we went with, we were the four white people at every hip hop gig that we went to at that time. At the first stages, I got booed off for being white. I didn't even get to speak. I had bottles thrown at me man, literally. In the Borderland club run by 279, that's still around now, he invited me cos he'd heard of me or seen me rapping somewhere. I come on the stage and got bottles thrown at me, and 'why you giving the mic to a white person?' Went back the next month, did it again, got booed off again. Did it again, they let me rap, got one or two claps. Next month did it again, that was it, I was in and then it all changed. Then Eminem came and it all changed. Now there's only four black people in the clubs.

Chester P's account describes a time when white rappers were effectively barred from participating in hip hop and Chester had to prove himself and gain approval. Many white artists were not taken seriously so lyrics, delivery, verbal dexterity and crowd control were essential to get the slightest look in. Eminem's 'The Slim Shady LP', released in 1999, was a global hit but caused significant controversy surrounding white rappers in hip hop. For many rappers I spoke to, this prompted a key turning point and caused attitudes to change of increased acceptance towards white rappers.

The make-up and dynamic of the scene is continuing to evolve. The ethnic diversity of hip hoppers in London is vast, despite the influx of white participants, and was

[23] 'Skinny' refers to the rapper Skinnyman and Chester's brother is rapper and producer Farma G.

reflected in my interviewee sample. Although all were male bar one female, the artists I spoke to were of various ethnicities including black, white, Asian and mixed race, of differing class backgrounds with some growing up on council house estates and dropping out of school and others being middle-class and university educated. Most had grown up in London but some were from other places around England or even abroad and moved to London either to further their rap career or for other employment reasons. The wide spectrum of hip hoppers adds diversity to the scene in terms of the musical influences they bring with them. For instance, Leen a migrant from St Lucia said when he first performed, people did not really know how to interpret his eclectic style: "I was coming from a Caribbean influence, American influence, British influence, so much influence, they didn't know how to take it." This reflects the hybridised identity of participants in glocal scenes (Stokes, 2004).

The multi-instrumentalist artist Dizraeli combines rap with folk music in his seven-piece hip hop fusion band called 'Dizraeli and the Small Gods'. However, his music has not been accepted by many 'purist' hip hop heads in the scene as it is seen to depart from hip hop *too* much. This raises the aforementioned common tension experienced by artists between 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity'. It is arguable Dizraeli is living out authenticity through making experimental and original music, which incorporates his multi-instrumental expertise and passion, in the production of hip hop. Despite rapping over beats, produced by a live band rather than being electronic (although there is a DJ in his band too that scratches over the top and adds flourishes to the live instruments), to many his music is not considered authentic hip hop. However, if Dizraeli made hip hop according to the boom bap[24] style, he could be viewed as inauthentic in terms of denying his musical background and

[24] See Appendix A for Hip Hop Glossary of Terms

interests, even though it would fit hip hop authenticity conceived as being based on its historical roots. Dizraeli said himself, "There's no need to be purist about it. I'd prefer to make it my own and bring in all the influences I love. I don't think there's a certain way to do rap or be a rapper or a certain thing you have to talk about or instrumentation you have to use…it's all hip hop to me." For Dizraeli, rapper authenticity trumps hip hop authenticity and his musical integrity is more important than appeasing purist gatekeepers in the London hip hop scene. Mirroring Lewin & William's (2009) research on punks, Dizraeli exerts a form of extreme individualism, developing a commitment to his own ideology of authenticity. Rappers of varying ethnicities and inevitable diverse musical influences and interests, face having to manage the tension between their own artistic preferences with that of the hip hop community.

4.3 Globalisation and Glocalisation

The process of globalisation, is defined rather broadly by Giddens (1990: 64) as "the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". Globalisation, then, refers to the increasing "interdependency and interrelatedness among different and geographically dispersed actors" (Archibugi & Iammarino, 2002). Hip hop has been particularly conducive to dispersion around the world to places remote from its origins. As Levy (2001: 134) states, hip hop constitutes "a global subculture that has entered people's lives and become a universal practice among youth the world over…From a local fad among black youth in the Bronx, it has gone on to become a global, post-industrial signifying practice, giving new parameters of meaning to otherwise locally or nationally diverse identities." In

contrast to Smitherman's (2000: 268) suggestion that appropriations of hip hop outside the USA are derivative or a parody of African-American culture, the London scene, along with other studies of appropriated hip hop (Elafros, 2013; Condry, 2001), indicates that hip hop is reinterpreted to fit the local context. Indeed, as Huq (2006: 58) has suggested, the process of globalisation is "more nuanced than a flattening one-way process of imposing products on an unsuspecting audience of cultural dupes willing to embrace this cultural homogeneity". The interplay between the global and the local is often referred to as 'glocalisation', a term coined by Robertson (1995) to describe the process whereby cultural products are inscribed with new meanings and reworked to relate to the site of appropriation. Despite innovative interpretations of hip hop in the London scene, there still appears to be a dialectic between inherited notions of authentic hip hop based on American models, with more localised understandings and re-workings of the music and culture.

Since hip hop originated in the USA, it was treated as a template to base cultural interpretations on and still remains strongly influential on UK rap. According to Hesmondhalgh and Melville (2001: 87) this has not held British rap in good stead: "UK hip hop has been marginalised and to a certain extent impoverished by an over-reverential attitude towards US rap by artists initially reproducing styles and languages developed in very different contexts." The global spread of hip hop to localised scenes such as London creates a tension between the cultural dictate to adhere to certain American principles of keeping it real, with that of staying true to oneself based on the local context and understanding of the real. According to Monsieur Frites, simply rapping in British instead of American accents has taken some time to be accepted by the wider public in the UK:

> I mean I guess New York is a pretty similar place to London in a lot of ways. But I guess in England scenes are a lot smaller and we're essentially influenced by America. We're like, we just interpret it in our own localised way. I don't really know why it's so different but it is *really* different. But I think it's interesting how like, even on a commercial level, like rapping in a British accent is quite accepted now but I think that's taken a long time. I don't listen to people like Tinie Tempah and Professor Green[25] but just the fact they are charting and rapping in English accents is quite a cool thing cos back in the day, even the early 2000s, you had really cheesy people like Big Brothers and stuff that were just putting on fake American accents. I'm not really concerned with the charts but if the public are willing to hear rapping in a British accent then that can only be a good thing for the more underground scene. Cos I think for a long time, like not necessarily of UK hip hop, but people in the music industry and stuff in this country, like the notion of an English rapper is just, they wouldn't entertain that sorta thing. It's changed a lot over the last decade.

Although British rappers have been rapping in British accents since the 1980s, Monsieur Frites contends that it has only started to be commercially viable and accepted by the wider public in fairly recent years. Monsieur Frites suggests that because previously underground artists such as Tinie Tempah and Professor Green have become commercially successful, the tide may be turning for UK hip hop rappers as well. Responding to the appeal in hip hop to 'keep it real' required a period of adaptation rather than simple adoption as artists made it fit their local context. Rapping in their own accents was part of the authenticating process of reworking hip hop to the localised context. This mirrors Bennett's (2000: 138) research that the localisation of hip hop is not a smooth process but "fraught with tension and contradictions as young people attempt to reconcile issues of musical and stylistic authenticity with those of locality, identity and everyday life." In the London hip hop scene, rappers continue to struggle with the various tensions that arise in participating in a cultural form that did not originate in their country.

[25] Tinie Tempah and Professor Green originally started as underground grime artists in London but are now commercially successful, gaining mainstream coverage and charting in the Top Ten Singles Chart.

Experiencing and managing the growing globalising and 'glocalising' tendencies of modern life can be difficult for individuals on a micro level. Morley and Robins (1995: 121) argue, "Globalisation is profoundly transforming our apprehension of the world: it is provoking a new experience of orientation and disorientation, new senses of places and placeless identity". For rappers, negotiating both these liberating and disorientating processes can create a sense of struggle and confusion when making music and trying to be authentic.

4.4 Marketisation: mainstream versus underground

The increasing marketisation of hip hop has seen the music spread around the globe to local sites of adoption and appropriation and therefore is part of the story of globalisation just discussed. Previously existing on the margins of American society, hip hop was identified as having resistant qualities that appealed to youth so was marketed to the masses and co-opted by the mainstream (Perry, 2004). Hip hop's popularity boomed in the 1990s and became immensely commercially successful in the US and abroad.[26] As McLeod (1999: 136) comments, now faced with widespread acceptance, hip hop artists found themselves in the contradictory position of being 'inside' the mainstream culture they had, in part, defined themselves as being against. McLeod suggests that to preserve a 'pure' identity, artists began to invoke the concept of authenticity to draw clear boundaries around their culture. Thus there emerged a strong demarcation between mainstream and underground hip hop. Similarly, Harrison (2009: 2) defines 'underground' as a subgenre of hip hop that emerged as an alternative independent movement to mainstream rap following the commercial

[26] A.K. Harrison (2009) notes that in 1998 six different rap artists held the top spot on *Billboard* magazine's Top 200 album chart.

popularity of the music in America since the mid-1990s. In contrast to the US, UK hip hop music has never been commercially popular in terms of enjoying high record sales or reaching number one in the Official UK Top 40 Singles Chart. Although UK-based rappers can position themselves against mainstream American rap, it is arguable the underground concept is more problematic than a straightforward opposition to commercial hip hop, especially as many UK rap artists would like a degree of recognition and payment.

Defining 'underground' in relation to music is a tricky business. The underground has become increasingly contested and debated with many suggesting it does not really exist in the internet age. The advent of digital technology, file sharing websites and social networking sites have facilitated the spread of (underground) music in a prolific manner that was previously inconceivable. According to Simon Reynolds (2005), "the web has extinguished the idea of a true underground; it's too easy for people to find out anything now."[27] However, following Graham (2010: 10), underground is not simply about access or the physical context of the music, but rather "a practice, a cultural philosophy of music that exists outside the mainstream." Although underground is often understood in terms of being contra 'mainstream', it is more helpful to think of it as on the fringes of the mainstream, rather than diametrically opposed as they often crossover and feed into one another. Rather than understanding underground as a vague way of encapsulating anything that is non-commercial or independent as some scholars have (Harkness, 2012; Perry, 2004), it is perhaps better conceived of as based on shared values such as creative control and freedom of expression over commercial success and a high regard for sincerity.

[27] Simon Reynolds and Mark Fisher (2005) "Simon's interview with CCRU" on 'k-punk' http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/004807.html

The usage of the term ‘underground’ in the London hip hop scene is fraught with contradiction. On the one hand, rappers view independent music as uncorrupted by money-driven major record labels and thus more creatively pure, so actively seek underground status and its attendant authenticity status. However on the other hand, artists continually bemoan the underground nature of UK hip hop and its marginal status, lamenting its lack of recognition, absence on radio and mainstream media and the difficulty to make money from it. In an interview Stig said, “I want success but money is not my priority.” It appears that artists want more fans, sales and recognition, but do not want to ‘sell out’. Selling out is another slippery concept because it is difficult to know the line between making a living and being successful, with that of making *too* much money and being perceived to have compromised one’s musical integrity.

To what extent are artists in the London hip hop scene actually maintaining their underground status (un)intentionally, despite complaints their music should be more celebrated? It would appear that many rappers who consider themselves (and the scene more broadly) not to have ‘made it’ *yet* are thwarting their own musical careers through fierce attachment to the not selling out line, and are therefore unlikely to gain mainstream success. But there are other rappers who undoubtedly adhere to underground values and principles and actively strive for a status in keeping with their underground credentials. For instance, Stig stated, “It’s important to me that I prioritise my reasons for making music which is for the love of it and rap itself”, i.e. not money. Rappers who would like mainstream success, but are not popular enough, often place blame on the absence of industry interest in the scene and the lack of funding and institutional support. However, in many cases rappers may not realise the

scene is underground based on their own actions, attitudes and choices regarding collective hard-line stances on authenticity, selling out and toeing the line. It is therefore possible the DIY and entrepreneurial nature of the scene is not out of necessity but brought about by the rappers themselves.

The DIY and entrepreneurial ethic in UK hip hop

Perry (2004: 202) argues that underground artists are usually not signed to major record labels and do not receive much mainstream radio play, which aptly describes the London hip hop scene. None of the London-based hip hop artists in the scene I investigated are on the 'Big Three' major record labels Universal, Sony-BMG, or Warner. However, there are a notable few UK artists who started out in hip hop that have successfully crossed over into the mainstream and are signed to major labels or labels owned and/or distributed by majors. For instance, Plan B is signed to Warner, rapper Example releases music on Epic Records which is owned by Sony Music Entertainment, and Dizzee Rascal set up a new label called Dirtee Stank with Universal as the parent company and Island Records as distributor.[28] Of the UK hip hop community that I studied, the rappers are either unsigned or on independent record labels that they have set up themselves, highlighting the DIY and entrepreneurial nature of the scene. For instance, Jehst[29] launched the self-financed YNR Productions in 1998 in his university halls of residence and more recently, rapper Fliptrix set up High Focus Records which is now home to the currently popular UK hip hop artists Jam Baxter, Dirty Dike, Leaf Dog and Verb T. Other underground

[28] See 'List of Artists by Record Label' on Wikipedia for comprehensive breakdown of record labels and the artists signed to them http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Lists_of_artists_by_record_label
[29] More information on Jehst can be accessed at http://www.britishhiphop.co.uk/features/articles/jehst_-_biography.html

record labels self-built by artists in the scene include ‘Boom Bap Professionals’ and ‘No Long Ting’. Jester Jacobs stated in an interview that “the UK hip hop scene is kinda interesting because there is no budget really on the underground so people just have to be more creative.” Stig put it more emphatically, “it’s a very DIY culture. You *have* to do it yourself, you know what I mean? It’s a business but it’s mostly kids trying to make music. There’s not some big industry with a clever thought-out marketing machine behind it.” As there has been fluctuating interest in UK hip hop over the years by the music industry and record labels, artists have had to turn to Do-It-Yourself practices and develop an entrepreneurial ethic to get their music recorded and distributed.

In contrast to views, such as those held by Reynolds (2005), that the internet is extinguishing the idea of underground music, digital media and technology in many respects is what keeps the underground scene alive. The use of digital resources has created a strong DIY ethos in the hip hop scene with artists and fans becoming entrepreneurs, which is changing scene dynamics. Whereas recording facilities were previously costly and only available to professionals at studios, digital technology has opened access to the recording process for aspiring artists. As Ryan and Peterson (2004) note, the creative potential of ‘amateur’ musicians and producers has been substantially enhanced by relatively cheap state-of-the-art technology. However, most of the creative labour in these DIY and underground music collectives is voluntary and unpaid. Musical practices of downloading, peer-to-peer file-sharing, social-networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and sound-sharing websites like SoundCloud and YouTube have resulted in non-monetised music production and distribution, as well as consumption. Artists are mostly unpaid for their creative output and day-to-day work, so being able to make a living from one’s music is highly

precarious. As Chang (2005: 439) articulates, hip hop is a commodity in the global media industry yet is also the lifeblood of numerous local underground scenes. While some people in the industry are making lots of money, especially in the USA, from exploiting hip hop for profit, at the same time there are people struggling to survive in local underground scenes. For rappers wanting to make money in the London scene, they are required to be ever more entrepreneurial in diversifying their 'products' to include merchandise such as hoodies and caps, and selling instrumental beats alongside their albums. Not everyone is looking to secure substantial money from rapping though, however, this could also just be a narrative they tell themselves. For example Monsieur Frites stated, "If I could make as much money to be able to afford rent and go for a few beers on the weekend, that would be fine, that would be awesome. Not be like rich or anything. It's not about money." How artists negotiate the complexities of making music in the digital age and earn money from it while holding down a day job is explored in further depth in the next chapter.

The shift to the individual subject being responsible for his or her music career success, in addition to the emphasis on DIY and entrepreneurial practices, are arguably a consequence of neoliberal political and economic agendas. As Gill (2008) argues, neoliberalism increasingly constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are autonomous, calculating and self-motivating. Agency and responsibility is thus located entirely with the actor, and the precarious relation to employment is celebrated as a condition of 'flexibility' and viewed positively as 'entrepreneurial' (Chapman, 2013). This offers a contrasting (and sobering) perspective to those who celebrate DIY cultures as untainted creativity and anti-capitalist in orientation. The rappers' varying experiences of uncertainty and stress regarding making money from their music speaks to the growing literature on the transformation of work in late capitalism

(Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). One of the key themes of late capitalism is the need to constantly update and re-skill as a worker in the cultural and creative industries to adapt to rapid technological changes.

4.5 Digitisation and the impact of the internet

The onset of the digital age has had profound repercussions on UK hip hop, as elsewhere. The internet and in particular social networking sites have revolutionised how scene members communicate, inform, promote, and interact. Instead of flyers, posters, magazine advertisements and other forms of print media promoting a show or album release, online media now dominates as the primary channel of information. Musical practices of downloading and peer-to-peer file sharing, podcasts, YouTube, and social networking sites are producing new spaces of creativity and innovative social processes of collaboration where old hierarchies are being destabilised, such as between professional and amateur musicians, and the blurring of boundaries between producer and consumer (Deuze, 2007). However, there are some scholars (Pratt, 2004: 220) who challenge the rhetoric of 'new' media as crude technological determinism by suggesting that there has been less of a rupture than we think.

Although few statistics are available for hip hop consumption specifically in the UK, more general data on the number of music downloads reveals the rapidly changing context rappers are required to negotiate working. The 2009 IFPI Digital Music Report found that 110 million tracks were downloaded in 2008, up 42 per cent from 2007 and that seven out of ten music consumers download music illegally because it

is available free.[30] As most rappers continue struggling to make money in the digital era, UK hip hop remains largely underground with no artists on major record labels and rappers having to set up their own independent labels in order to release music. However, the positive side is that these independent and alternative networks of distribution arguably enable not only the artists signed to their labels, but also a string of other companies and musicians across the country to reach a much wider public than might have otherwise been possible (Hesmondhalgh, 1998).

Vinyl and Record Shops

A considerable shift that artists are still adapting to is the transition from fans buying vinyl to downloading MP3s. The repercussions of the shift is not purely about the physical product and the onset of piracy but about scene dynamics and the way in which people used to perform, network and support one another. Nearly all the rappers I talked to who grew up in London mentioned 'Deal Real', a record shop in Soho where artists and fans alike used to congregate and hang out as well as buy records. It was run by 'Pete Real' and originally located on Noel Street before closing in 2000. Under new management, Deal Real opened on premises just off Carnaby Street but closed a few years later, which according to many scene participants deprived London of a key meeting point. As rapper Monsieur Frites reminisced, "there was a record shop in Carnaby Street, called 'Deal Real' which had an open mic every Friday. So there was a central point where everyone could congregate and meet. It was just really healthy, like for hip hop in London." Artists performed in front of the gathered crowd and met other 'hip hop heads' forming a fertile creative hub with frequent rapping contests, providing the catalyst for numerous collaborations. The

[30] IFPI Digital Music Report (2009) http://www.ifpi.org/content/library/DMR2009-real.pdf

record shop provided a community of support and practice, with artists participating in what Wenger (2000) would call a 'social learning system'. In these complex social learning systems, participants gain social competence and skills, personal experience and also attain and contribute to a sense of belonging. It is also likely that attitudes and behaviours regarding keepin' it real would also have been learned, consciously or unconsciously, by scene members.

Deal Real and other record shops like Mr Bongo provided the place for fans to purchase rare 12 inch singles or mixtapes and other UK hip hop cassettes not available in music shops like HMV or other high street chains. However, as Hesmondhalgh (1998) has commented, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of specialist independent record shops operating in the UK. As discussed above, Deal Real opened several times under new management before closing for good. Other record shops closed in the early 2000s too, including Mr Bongo in 2003. Rappers such as Yungun now lament and reminisce that the record shops are "all gone now". He explained their communal importance, "That's where you'd go and meet like-minded people into the same music and same culture and were trying to make that music as well." Hodkinson's (2004) research on goth music had similar specialist retailers, which like hip hop, were significant in creating a localised consistent style and aided in unifying participants The record shops not only brought together rappers but DJs and producers making hip hop as well. As lyricists, rappers only make up the vocal component of a song so need to collaborate with beat-makers for the musical accompaniment. Yungun explains:

> It was through common friends in records shops and friends of mine in west London, I got to meet the first DJ producer that I'd ever met, Harry Love[31] and he's brilliant. Still one of the best I've ever heard of. And it was then that there was sort of like the chance to make songs cause he actually made music and, with me and a couple of my friends, that put it together with lyrics. So it was like, we actually make songs now. We started making recordings. And from there, through just sort of networking – I didn't realise it was networking at the time – but that was what it was; networking with other people, we got a few gigs.

As hip hop is a collaborative process, requiring a rapper and a beat-maker and potentially more people if one plans to professionally record it, meeting other artists in person used to be an essential part of music-making. The record shop, then, provided an important space for performing and collaborating in the London hip hop scene, which as Yungun states, could lead to recording vinyl and launch artists' careers. Much of this process has shifted online now, where potential collaborators meet in forums or through social networking sites and send beats, lyrics, recordings and so on through the internet, which does not require meeting face to face. Although many hip hoppers have suggested this has negatively impacted the sense of community and camaraderie in the scene, it has opened up possibilities for collaborations all over the world. Several rappers I spoke to have used beats from American or Australian producers or written verses for guest appearances on tracks of American rappers.

Radio

In conjunction with the record shops, there were pirate radio stations in London, the most popular of which was Itch FM which ran for 8 years from the late 1990s, broadcasting hip hop to anyone able to pick up the signal. Trice reminisces, "back then we had Itch FM, which was the pirate radio station and that was well run by all

[31] Harry Love is a well-known and highly respected DJ and producer in UK hip hop. He regularly collaborates with rappers, producing beats for their songs and is still very active in the scene today.

the DJs on it who were like DJs from all round London and they were the best of the UK hip hop DJs. And so they were always playing new UK hip hop." Monsieur Frites also recalls,

> When I was around 15 or 16, I started to be able to pick up a radio station called Itch FM. It was like a pirate hip hop station. I think it was based in north London cos where I was in south west London had a pretty rubbish reception but there was like loads of shows on there that was UK hip hop and that's like where I heard a lot of early Klashnekoff stuff. That's where I first heard Jehst and Taskforce and stuff. And that like really, really opened my eyes to UK hip hop.

For many young Londoners in the 1980s and 1990s interested in hip hop, perhaps having heard some American rap, but too young to attend clubs, pirate radio was their first exposure to UK hip hop. Some rappers, such as Yungun when he was a teenager, even made his own broadcasts using a pirate radio transmitter and aired live the rap cyphers he and his friends organised. Grassroot intermediaries, as Jenkins and Deuze (2007) note, spread content – legally and illegally – across the mediascape. Despite the low-budget intermediary that pirate radio served as, it allowed DJs and artists to attain greater visibility and influence, even cult status within a burgeoning underground London scene. Artists featured on pirate radio or who had released a vinyl of their track were immediately considered authentic rappers because to get to that stage they would have had to pay their dues on the underground performance circuit before earning the opportunity to record or receive beats from a producer. With the onset of digital radio broadcasting, radio stations began to switch to the DAB format in the 2000s. The grassroots level of cultural production is still a key thread of UK hip hop, but is now through the digital formats of YouTube, podcasts and SoundCloud.

Print Media

The other dominant form of keeping up to date with hip hop was through print media. *Hip Hop Connection*, a magazine that fans and artists considered the holy grail of all things hip hop was a key source of information on new releases, interviews with artists, and brought UK hip hop to the attention of many people who had only heard of US rap. With its first release in 1988, *Hip Hop Connection* was a regular magazine publication, before moving to an online format. Originally a hotline phone number run by a radio DJ where rap fans could get information on upcoming events, *Hip Hop Connection* began as a one-off publication in 1988 before being made a regular magazine release by founder Chris Hunt. After several owners in the unlikely places of Ely, Bath and finally London, editor from 1993 Andy Cowan ran the magazine until its demise. It moved to an online format before folding in 2009, making it the longest running monthly periodical dedicated to hip hop, despite being British based.[32] During much of its history, *Hip Hop Connection* had to compete with the American hip hop magazine *The Source*, and although it featured more American rap acts than British ones, remained more popular in this country.

When interviewing rappers, I usually asked them how they got into hip hop. The most frequent response was a long list of influential American artists. So I would then ask a follow up question querying how they discovered UK hip hop:

> From buying *Hip Hop Connection*. Erm, when it was a regular paper publication. They actually had, you know, a good spotlight on UK hip hop. I was clearing a bunch of stuff from my Mum and Dad's and I was looking at *Hip Hop Connection* from 98/99 and yeah it was like the first releases of the likes of Jehst, and yeah it was seeing them get good reviews, or interviews or features. People like Roots Manuva and Jehst, Taskforce. And then I remember being particularly

[32] Burrell, Ian. 'Hip-hop and it don't stop: what does the future hold for Hip Hop Connection?' *The Independent* 8th September 2008.

> kind of like, I think it must have been 98/99; there was a bit on Cappo, who's a spitter from Nottingham. I think it was the first, it was just a tape he had sent in, or a CD, it wasn't like a vinyl release or anything, and remember thinking this sounds interesting because I was living in Derbyshire at the time and he was just down the road from me. And then he dropped a wax the following year and obviously he's at the stage where he is now and he's highly respected. Deservedly so. So yeah that's how I got into UK hip hop.

As Benny Diction's answer illustrates, the magazine was a key source of information for those living outside London or who may not have had access to record shops. Stig of the Dump, another rapper who grew up outside London, also talked about the differences between accessing music then and now:

> Like when I was a kid, in order to be into a genre of music, a sub genre of music, it took dedication. I had to go down to a record shop down a shitty little dark alley, probably a rack of ten CDs to see what was out, read *Hip Hop Connection*. It was hard. That's why people my age and older are all bitter cos they're all, 'ah I had to put effort in'.

The shift in accessing music and information online has had various repercussions on the scene, not simply in terms of sales. As Stig suggests through his 'dedication', because of the ease with which people can now listen to and download music, as well as read about artists on blogs and other websites, there are more transitory and ephemeral fans. Previously, one had to part with cash to access information and music so there was more of a commitment involved. As a result, quite often the 'tourist' type of fan serves as a marker of differentiation from a 'real fan' (Bennett, 2004).

For rappers starting out and trying to get their music heard, the shift to digital was a struggle to adjust to and for many is still tough. South London based rapper Efeks said,

> It's so difficult. I mean, all the sort of conventional ways of getting your music out, they're all sort of slowly just dying out anyway. The magazines are not really there anymore. The record shops ain't there anymore. It's like everything is digital now. Everything is online. It's not even like before like when you go up

> to the radio station and put your CD in a DJ's pigeonhole. It's not like that now. They want you to send them the MP3. Everything is digital. And then it's like, if you're not doing that, it's nigh on impossible.

Artists now need to utilise digital means of promoting and distributing music. The most common is music sharing platform Bandcamp[33] where consumers can purchase albums or get free downloads. In a bid to secure a wider audience and receive payment directly, most UK artists have now set up their music to be distributed on iTunes. Adapting to these shifts towards digitisation have made some artists feel uncomfortable in the new media arena, causing a degree of nostalgia of a bygone era. Although record shops, radio and print media have collapsed, to a large degree all these channels of information and music sharing and distribution still exist but in online formats. Suspect Packages, one of the main distributors of UK hip hop, is now solely an online shop and home to new releases as well as holding a back catalogue of UK hip hop in stock. In addition, blogs have taken over the role of hip hop magazines. There are numerous blogs and websites dedicated to UK hip hop such as Wordplaymagazine.com, Broken-Culture.co.uk and UKHH.com where content includes reviews of recent releases, the latest music videos, or interviews with certain rappers.

Social Networking Sites

In addition to the way music is produced and consumed, the internet has impacted the community feel of the scene. Yungun suggests, "it's completely transformed the way in which people interact and the way in which they find out about things and get hold

[33] Bandcamp functions as an online music shop and means of promotion for independent artists.

of music. It's changed everything." Several of the artists I spoke to saw Facebook in particular as a key catalyst of change. For instance Chester P said,

> It's Facebook, that's what it is. No one needs to go out to network no more. You don't need to go the club and meet everyone that way because you can just do it on Facebook. I mean people don't be real with each other because people don't be in each other's face. So everyone's just pretending because no one can judge you for what you are because it's just a digital image of you. It's all a digital mask. It's bizarre.

As well as personal, family, work and rapper (including on- and off-stage) identities, artists now have an additional mediated identity, played out on social networking sites. Rappers now need to manage their music and identity practices at multiple levels, making 'keepin' it real' an even bigger challenge. As Chester's statement indicates, when there is inconsistency between any of these levels, an artist's authenticity is called into question. The challenge also relates to the tension between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity because one makes and performs hip hop as an individual but functions as part of a hip hop community. Both are distinct, though closely related, but often do not align.

Jam Baxter finds it difficult to reveal anything personal on Facebook as his music is already very revealing. He claims he does not use social networking sites as much as his contemporaries:

> I'm a lot less active on that than a lot of people. I'm not really like a status updater or a Twitter person that says what they're having for breakfast. I'll use Facebook to promote nights that I'm at and talk to people and message people. In general, yeah the music is personal and I do feel like I'm giving a certain part of myself to other people and interacting quite a lot with the world through that. In terms of detailing my everyday day-to-day life with three or four thousand people that I've never met before, I've never really been one for that. Every time I sit down and think I should tweet something, I'm like, what would I say?

Efeks also struggles with adapting to using digital tools and readily admits, "I'm a bit of a technophobe. I struggle with the computer and that. I do it in a way, begrudgingly. Cause I'm still not kind of au fait with that whole technology thing. I'd much rather do things like old school style. Like, that's the way, you've got to adapt and keep up with the times. So, Twitter, Facebook, all of that stuff, they're like essential tools for UK hip hop artists. You've got to use them, even if you don't like to; you have to." Having to utilise social networking sites and other digital tools against one's wishes could be interpreted as acting *in*authentically as it goes against one's natural inclinations. There was a common sentiment felt by rappers that they *had* to use social media to achieve any sort of exposure, even if they did not want to, which was just accepted as something required if you wanted to be a rapper. Instead of viewing the decision to 'play the game' as it were as inauthentic, the reality of negotiating these tensions means that compromises have to be made. Adapting to the digital shift in music and presenting oneself online are ongoing tasks rappers have to manage.

Performing Live

The focus on maintaining one's online presence and various social network channels can come at a price. Despite the massive changes towards digitally producing and distributing music, performing live is still unanimously considered essential. Yungun explains some of the changes he has experienced:

> In general, you see that people are now doing live shows that don't know how to do it and they don't understand. And even just standing on a stage and projecting your voice clearly is something you have to learn how to do and it's quite hard. And a lot of people, you see them now, they might be known cause they've done a recording that everyone's got access to but they don't have the form and it's a bit weird. They really have to learn that and sometimes it comes second. For me, it was the other way round, and a lot of people that came up at the same time as

> me, because the first way to get your stuff heard was live, like at an open mic or whatever. And then you could, like, if you did enough of that and you were known enough then someone would bother spending quite a lot of money to put your music on vinyl – or a CD or whatever else – then you could get your recordings out there and like you'd go on the radio and whatever else…I think a lot of people in the music industry still believe that that's really fundamental to making an artist popular. People have to see them live and connect with them.

Performing live and attending gigs constitutes everyday life for a rapper and therefore 'lived authenticity'. Rappers want to be authentic in terms of being able to perform well, move a crowd and have strong lyrical content. This has implications for both rapper authenticity (individualism and integrity) as well as hip hop authenticity (following rules and gaining approval). There is a tension between one's identity on and offstage, because although rappers will no doubt be more energetic and confident whilst performing, they do not want to come across as having a persona too much as they might be interpreted as fake. For rappers to 'live out' authenticity, then, it seems their life and music have to align, reflecting Becker's (1982) contention that artists and their music are not judged in isolation but together. However, this raises the question of whether it is still possible to be authentic with them not in alignment. For example, in a rap battle where two opponents compete against each other using lyrics, the style is braggadocios and can be confrontational or even an aggressive display of one-upmanship in a bid to win. As such, a warm and friendly person in 'everyday' life might become more boastful and adversarial, which is not to say they are being inauthentic, but rather adapting to the context of being a performer on stage where certain showmanship styles are the norm. This can be understood as Moore's (2002) 'authenticity of expression' or Taylor's (1997) similar conception of 'authenticity as primality' in which an expression is perceived to be authentic if it can be traced to an initiatory response.

4.6 The 'Golden Era(s)' and the London hip hop scene now

Similar to the pervasive discourse concerning the 'Golden Era' of American hip hop during the 1990s, UK hip hop also has had a supposed golden era. Golden eras in hip hop denote a period of time that is reputed to be awash with innovation and quality, usually with pioneers prolifically producing albums or specific tracks that are considered groundbreaking (Green, 2003). In the UK context however, there is some discrepancy as to when exactly this golden era occurred, and indeed whether there has been more than one golden era.

Many hail the period of 1998-2003 as a prime time of UK hip hop in terms of the vibrancy of the scene, the regular nights, the number of artists, the close-knit community, and the volume of records being sold. In addition to the strong culture around record shops, there were frequent club nights bringing people together and popularising the music. 'Kung Fu', a UK hip hop night held at The Underworld venue in Camden, started in 2000 before petering out in 2007. It was a hugely popular event with queues of people wanting to get in trailing down the street, at one point causing road blocks. It was an important meeting place for artists to perform and meet producers as well as stage contests and open mics[34]. Parky commented,

> It was different back then because with Kung Fu everyone was trying to get on, and we were all putting out records and people were buying them. It was a different kind of realm. And to be honest with you, it was a community. You'd come to Kung Fu, Klashnekoff weren't on the bill, but he'd perform, he'd be there. You know what I mean? Tommy Evans would be there. Taskforce would always spit on the mic. Chester or Farma would always be there and it would just be the shit. Harry Love would be on the decks. It was just a place to come if you were a rapper, or you're a DJ, or you're a beat maker.

[34] See Appendix A for *Hip Hop Glossary of Terms*.

Kung Fu was so popular and well attended, that it became a key meet-up point for artists wanting to make it in the scene as the opportunity for collaboration and performance could lead to a career break. Yungun said, "There used to be physical places you'd go to and you could just turn up and know that you'd bump into certain people there. The fact that a lot of the influential people would just be all in the same physical space, all at once. You know? That's not so much the case anymore." Other popular nights that were central hubs of the scene included Speaker's Corner in Brixton and People's Army in Brixton.

Within the scene there is a strong sense of history and paying homage to who has gone before you. There is something similar to a 'heritage' that ought to be acknowledged and respected, creating in many ways a hierarchy. In an interview Micall Parknsun reflected this perspective when saying, "I'm always up for keeping the bloodline going. Our bloodline was Hijack, Gunshot, Demon Boyz, Rodney P, London Posse, MCD." In using the term 'bloodline', Parky affiliates himself with, and gives credit to, artists that have gone before him which links him to their heritage and thus with a sense of authenticity. This tactic can be seen to marry rapper authenticity with hip hop authenticity as the rapper locates himself within the canon of historical hip hop to attain authenticity. An alternative reading of the dominant 'heritage' discourse is that references to a 'bloodline' can be considered fascistic rather than romantic. Through rigidly constructing a sense of exclusivity, rappers might cast those who do not follow historical tropes of hip hop, based on previously celebrated artists, as outsiders and thus potentially inauthentic.

The continual reference to golden eras by scene participants arguably serves various functions. On an obvious level, knowledge and awareness demonstrates subcultural

capital on the part of the user (Thornton, 1995) and can also situate oneself as having an important position in the scene history (Kruse, 2010). The prevalence of the golden era discourse pays direct homage to American hip hop, borrowing the exact term in a bid to position itself as a serious scene with acts as good as, if not rivalling, American artists in *their* golden era. On a broader level, the phrase 'golden era' places the UK scene as a constituent part of a larger historical trajectory that connects participants to other practitioners at different stages in time, creating a lineage of rap that helps the UK scene identify being part of a larger hip hop nation (Alim, 2006). This practice is associated with hip hop authenticity and is also a way in which rappers can appeal to authenticity, in suggesting that they are continuing, and are part of, the hip hop elite.

The heyday of the 2000s in UK hip hop began to quickly dissipate which some suggest the internet and illegal downloads were responsible for. After the height of the supposed golden era in the early 2000s, which encompassed regular club nights like Kung Fu and Speaker's Corner, pirate radio stations broadcasting only UK hip hop, and fans supporting the scene through buying music and attending gigs regularly, things started to quieten and close down. Record shops folded and Kung Fu ceased trading in 2007. The independent record label 'Low Life' which housed many of the most popular UK hip hop artists such as Skinnyman, Jehst and Braintax, closed in early 2008. Comments and concerns abounded about hip hop dying but in many ways it was a time of transition within the scene with practitioners adapting to the digital age. Jam Baxter, a rapper currently on the High Focus Record label, reflects on his disappointment at finally reaching an age to be able to participate in the scene but discovering it was dissipating:

> Then when I was finally 18, Deal Real, Mr Bongo, they'd all closed down and all the nights that had music. And everyone was talking about how the UK hip hop scene was on its way out and I was just like 'fuck!' Now I'm finally here, I'm 18 and I'm making music that I like, everyone's fucked off and everyone's talking about it crumbling. I was like 'shit, what do I do now?' Then I was just like, you know, I'm surrounded by an enough talent of people just starting out that I think are really talented. There's enough of a wealth of people here to start a new wave ourselves rather than be a kind of continuation. And now it's really good cos all the old skool guys who are still doing it like Chester and Jehst and everyone, they've kind of integrated with the new things going on and everyone's collaborating together from those two kind of ages of it so I think it's really going somewhere again.

In this passage Jam Baxter articulates how the scene waned for a few years on the brink of decline but is now enjoying a renaissance with the next generation of young artists coming to the fore. The evolving nature and sense of change in the scene depending on whom the key agents are indicates how UK hip hop is continuously unfolding and adapting in the face of change which has implications for lived out authenticity. As Stig commented, "I hate this dying thing. Like ultimately as long as people will make it, and people will listen to it, it's never going to die. I think it's changing and I think it's going to continue to change."

UK Hip Hop Revival

Following a dip in popularity and success in the late 2000s, there is a general consensus that UK hip hop is enjoying somewhat of a revival at the moment. Many credit the independent record label High Focus[35] for this resurgence as they are home to some of the most popular UK rap artists currently. Edward Scissortongue explained the changing nature of the UK hip hop scene as follows,

[35] I contacted rapper Fliptrix, CEO of High Focus Records, multiple times for an interview but he never resplied to any of my correspondence.

> The scene's much like a roller coaster. It peaks when a label is making really good stuff and then troughs when that label goes under or goes to shit. Then it peaks when another label starts flying the flag again. And that's happened two or three times. The names that spring to mind are Low Life and, and er Dented came out for a bit. Smashed it. And, Young and Restless – YNR – and now High Focus. That's just how it's gone, a bit like that…So yeah, we're just the latest gang to come out the ashes and start flying the flag again. And it's closely linked to like a lot of hard work.

High Focus Records successfully utilise social media resources with slick music videos accompanying every release on YouTube, heavy promotion in blog and online magazine outlets, as well as strong followings of individual rappers on Facebook and Twitter. The artists perform extremely regularly and tour all the small towns around the UK, gathering a loyal fan base. Their live performances are famous for being highly energetic affairs and they usually have the whole "gang" representing the label creating a sense of fun and debauchery that excites the audience. Being a unit appears to have given the rap collective an added advantage in an otherwise individual-dominated and fragmented scene. The emphasis on being a 'crew' or 'gang' might also be a bid for stability and belonging to balance the dislocation characterising life in late modernity (Lewin & Williams, 2009).

Despite the scene experiencing somewhat of a revival, it is still a struggle to get noticed and get heard in the current economic and social climate. Maintaining one's presence online while organising and doing live performances, as well as actually making music, presents various challenges to living out authenticity. As Jester Jacobs said about being a rapper in the London scene,

> I think it's the healthiest it's been for a while. If there was a better support system for acts that have been around for a while, trying to make it independently, that would be great. If there were regular nights for everyone doing what they want to do, that would be great too. It's a shame there's no *Hip Hop Connection* magazine. No print based media covering what's going on. When you put out a record, with a video and expect it to sell, you've got like a month for it to get

> popping otherwise you're just fucked and you've got to start again. And that's a shame; people don't realise what goes into making an album, especially if it's a good one that you've really worked hard on. It's a shame. I don't know what the answer is. I think its great UK acts are topping the charts and hip hop is pop music these days. The underground scene leaves a lot to be desired. There's no unity at all. I don't know how there's supposed to be more unity, I don't know what the answer is cos it involves work from everyone and no one wants to do that kind of work.

The decline in cohesiveness and community was a common theme that emerged from the data, which many considered to be a result of the lack of regular communal spaces to meet and hang out which record shops and regular club nights used to provide. There were also several complaints in interviews about a lack of communication between promoters, rappers, producers and other stakeholders in the scene making it seem very disorganised and fragmented. For instance Parky said, "The one thing I don't rate all of them for is communication. Because what I've discovered since Kung Fu died down, there'll be a Suspect Packages Live with certain UK artists, and there'll be a night on in South London with bare UK artists. Like, come on! Be on the same ball. And the thing is they all know each other. And the artist gets pissed off; they're just like, 'Fuck it. Let me just show up and get my money and then leave.' At the same time, people need to be under this umbrella, this one thing." Without an organised infrastructure or regular monthly nights at the same time and same place as there was before, for many the scene feels more fragmented and creates a sense of uncertainty and confusion. This disorganisation also contributes to the underground status of the scene because finding out about basic information can be a challenge, requiring extensive internet trawling to unearth gig details.

I experienced this firsthand when beginning the fieldwork component of my research. Being a UK hip hop fan and having prior knowledge of the scene and key artists was a significant advantage in knowing where to start looking for information. Even as

someone actively researching when and where gigs were happening, it could be very difficult to discover when events were taking place if you did not know where to look, who to ask, or which websites to consult. I unfortunately missed several gigs, only finding out about them afterwards. This is despite devoting time nearly every day to seeking out the next upcoming shows and following particular artists online because that is usually how live shows are announced. There is no centralised website, Facebook group, or other such facility that hosts a list of hip hop gigs taking place in London. When I started my fieldwork, I found a website on UK hip hop with an events page listing which had obviously not been updated in a very long time. It was then taken down and its adjoining twitter account announced it was being updated and would be re-launched in a month's time. However, it was never re-launched and is just a defunct website now. It became immediately clear that the days of flyers and posters promoting events were long gone and the internet, particularly social networking sites, were the main ways to find out about shows and new releases. It is unclear whether the challenge to find information about artists and gigs is because of a deliberate desire to be underground and thus authentic or whether rappers want to be more well known but because of their current underground status are not the first hits on a Google search.

The hip hop scene in London is dispersed over a vast geographical area but frequent shows tended to occur in Camden, Shoreditch and Brixton. In addition to one-off gigs such as album launches, tours, showcases or performances supporting a famous American artist, I found there were quite a few regular nights but not as regular as I previously had imagined. 'Regular', I quickly realised meant monthly and not weekly as I had thought might be the case. It also became apparent that many promoters did not communicate with each other as frequently there were not any UK hip hop shows

for some time, then they were all held on the same night and clashed with one another. Monthly UK hip hop events included Suspect Packages, the Elite Leagues, London Lyricist Lounge, Fat Gold Chain and Hoochinoo. However, over the course of my research, the monthly Suspect Packages night turned into a quarterly event and then disappeared altogether, and the Elite Leagues also stopped, and Fat Gold Chain stopped being a monthly event, highlighting the instability and continual evolution of the scene.

Scene participants are extremely diverse now in comparison to Chester and Efek's experiences of being the only, or one of a few, white people at hip hop shows. At some concerts I went to the crowd were predominantly white, and at others predominantly black. The reason for this was unclear; in general, attendees and artists were very mixed in terms of ethnicity and class. However, women are still overtly absent and a minority in the scene. Of all the 65 concerts and open mic nights I attended throughout my fieldwork, I only saw three female rappers of which two I never saw again. Dekay, a white, working-class rapper from Camden is a regular on the London open mic circuit and an extremely talented freestyler. She has also made her name in the increasingly popular 'Don't Flop' battle rap scene clocking up 160,000 views on YouTube videos of battles. In contrast, the tracks from Dekay's most recent album released in late 2012 have views of between 800 to 7000. This suggests, and was confirmed by many people I spoke to, that the battle rap scene and UK hip hop scene are quite separate with the audiences not buying or interested in battle rapper's independent music releases.

The general feeling that UK hip hop is experiencing a surge in popularity and building momentum again was further reinforced by the first ever UK hip hop festival being

staged during my fieldwork (so it arose as a frequent topic of conversation). The 'Boom Bap' UK hip hop festival was held in a field on the outskirts of Peterborough in September 2012 and had a capacity of 1000. The organisers, in a bid to bridge different audiences and bring people together, mixed the headlining acts with artists from the 'golden era' as well as popular contemporary rappers on the High Focus label. Involving artists from the golden era provided a sense of historical authenticity through paying homage to previous artists that had pioneered UK rap and also in the sense that they are considered to have done it properly back in the 'golden era'. In addition, the festival had a stage for Don't Flop battle raps. It was so successful that they repeated it again in September 2013 with more attendees and an even bigger and more impressive line-up. In some interviews, rappers I spoke to voiced dismay at not having been approached to perform at the festival, with one saying it was "High Focus-tastic" implying the High Focus label is dominating the scene at the moment, not leaving much space for other artists to get a look in. However, in reality the line-up was quite broad so placing blame on High Focus perhaps absolved any responsibility from rappers not well known enough or good enough to be included in the festival proceedings.

4.7 Conclusion

The social, cultural and economic conditions that rappers in London are working within now are considerably different from just ten years ago, the supposed heyday of the 'golden era'. The most common tension arising from the changing nature of the scene, manifesting itself in varying ways is between 'hip hop authenticity' and 'rapper authenticity', and how they needed to be managed alongside each other. This expresses itself in wanting to make hip hop according to historical predicates, yet also

being innovative, creative and original as a rapper. Another example is wanting to make hip hop for oneself or personal expression, but also desiring approval in the scene so following certain rules for acceptance. Artists struggle to make any money from their music, especially in the digital era of illegal downloading, but also because most are not well known enough to charge full price for albums so either give a lot of it way for free or for a nominal fee. Every single artist I spoke to informally and in interviews had some form of online presence and considered it essential in an underground network. Although the internet offers tools and entrepreneurial opportunity, many artists are still adjusting and learning how to maximise and exploit the various resources at their disposal. Underlying this changing context are factors propagated from structural forces, institutions and markets motivating, constraining and enabling agents in the hip hop scene. The different pressures and conditions of the contemporary London hip hop scene makes making music and being an authentic rapper profoundly challenging.

The effects wrought by the macro-level processes discussed in this chapter – migration, globalisation, capitalism and digitisation – have destabilised institutions and traditions, creating a sense of instability and yearning for people to find their "real selves" (Lewin & Williams, 2009: 66). As such, the messiness and contradictions presented by making hip hop in the contemporary context has in many ways placed an emphasis on authenticity. Spooner (1986: 226) claims that authenticity has "become an issue more and more in modern life because of our social experience of ever-increasing complexity…in the numbers and types of interaction we have to enter into". Societal complexity can lead to enhanced creativity and self-expression or increased dislocation and alienation. In this heightened feeling of flux, authenticity arguably becomes a significant concern and preoccupation. My thesis offers a snapshot of a

musical community at a specific moment in time as they adapt to changing globalising and local conditions and how authenticity on an everyday lived out basis is understood in this context. The specific struggles that underpin rappers' lives in the London hip hop scene and how they pertain to authenticity is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Authenticity in Everyday Life: Negotiating Struggle

> Like a dog chasing its tail, it's the sort of life we face
> It's gotta raise my pace cause the sufferings the same
> So no matter what you do, we all face the same fate
> It's splitting my insides; I'm filled up with faith
> We all struggle inside so I'm fighting for my stake
>
> 'Sunnicide' lyrics by Inja[36]

> Shits hard, no need to be specific
> We all got our struggles and we all gotta deal with it
>
> 'What's Up? 25/8' lyrics by Stig of the Dump[37]

"Reality is a synonym for struggle" – Dizraeli (Interview, 2012)

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural, social, and economic climate of London and music-making practices, present rappers with various difficulties and challenges. The changing and evolving London hip hop scene is creating an increasingly complicated and confused context where the 'rules' are not clear anymore and uncertainty abounds. Issues around money and business, social identity, media, and music-making itself means being a rapper in the London scene is a complicated and challenging vocation. Trying to manage one's finances and career plus a family and personal life presents various struggles that rappers must navigate in order to be (and remain) authentic. However, it has also become less clear-cut what, or whom, rappers are actually struggling against, thus making 'keepin' it real' ever more challenging in the everyday lived out context of the scene. Based on the ethnographic

[36] 'Sunnicide' lyrics by Inja (featuring Skuff) from album *The Skuff and Inja Show* (released 2009) http://www.hiphopinenglish.com/lyrics/skuff-inja-sunnicide/
[37] 'What's up? 25/8' lyrics by Stig of the Dump from album *Mood Swings* (released 2010) http://stigofthedumpuk.bandcamp.com/track/whats-up-25-8

data, this chapter maps out the struggles rappers have to negotiate in everyday life to 'keep it real'.

The chapter is structured according to key tensions that were identified in the data analysis, based on a critical realist understanding of authenticity as dialectic and emergent, while also building on key themes identified in the literature review. These struggles are characterised as follows: innovation versus rules, black versus white, working-class versus middle-class, rapper versus self, underground versus mainstream, young versus old and faker versus real. Although the headings are titled 'versus', it is important to note that they are not dualistic in terms of being either/or but rather a way of expressing the tension that exists between the two – the grey ground between two points.

5.2 Innovation versus convention

There is a strong tension between 'innovation' and 'convention' in the London hip hop scene. This manifests itself in numerous ways. As discussed in the previous chapter, it can be based on 'hip hop authenticity' versus 'rapper authenticity' where rappers experience a sense of struggle in wanting to continue hip hop's legacy as based on its history and origins, with that of their individual tastes, aspirations and making it their own. The innovation versus convention tension can also refer to who is authorised to make hip hop and what they can talk about, where certain characteristics are considered to be more authentic than others. The fixed and more prescribed attributes can be traced to arguments about 'origins' and the history of hip hop, its 'ghetto' beginnings (Forman, 2002), giving voice to African-American youth (Kitwana, 2005), and fighting oppression (Stapleton, 2008). Many people still hold

these factors – marginalisation, being black, hardship, lower class and so on – to epitomise authenticity in hip hop because they represent the social and economic context and identity of the agents who created the culture. However, these notions of authenticity are based on a specific time and place, namely New York in the 1970s and 1980s. Increasingly, artists, fans, and other stakeholders in the scene are realising these tenets of authenticity do not necessarily apply to them because London is a different locale with its own distinct set of hip hop practitioners. However, the fixed and purist values are enduring with some people, creating a tension with contemporary focused scene members who are keen to experiment and develop hip hop to make it their own.

A template conveying certain traditions in hip hop authenticity can be seen in McLeod's (1999) classification of 'real' hip hop. He argues the most commonplace claims are around: staying true to yourself; being black; the underground; being hard; the street; and the old school (p.139). These directly correlate to interviewee answers and observation in my fieldwork, despite McLeod basing his research on American hip hop. Edward Scissortongue (29)[38] told me when he first began rapping:

> I started by being surrounded by things that I thought I should be doing, should be saying, should be thinking. You know, like the classic rapper template, 'OK I want to become a rapper so what do I need?' I need a hoodie. I need to smoke weed and shot[39] weed. I need to pretend to be hard, I need to start fights and all this kind of bullshit. And it's prevalent, it's still there and it will never go away.

In this passage Scissortongue articulates the tension between prevailing conventional notions of what being a rapper is and thus needing to subscribe to them in order to be

[38] The first time a rapper's name is mentioned, I include his/her age in parentheses, as it is useful to bear in mind.
[39] 'Shotting' refers to dealing drugs.

considered authentic, with a more localised and individualised sense of what it is to be a rapper. Johnny also captured this tension when he stated, "You can't be like, 'this is real hip hop' then bastardise it."

How does one show allegiance and belonging yet articulate individuality at the same time? The problematic nature of adhering to a hip hop template of what is perceived to be 'real' is an issue concerning conformity. In a bid to be considered authentic, many rappers are perceived to follow a template of hip hop, which can be characterised as the 'rule-bound' properties listed by McLeod (1999) above. However, the irony is, that by conforming to a template, rappers run the risk of being fundamentally inauthentic by suggesting they have experienced or lived a life more fitting with the 'authentic' conventions of hip hop when they have not. Efeks (33) commented,

> It's a trend. Everyone's got to kind of portray themselves in a way that, like, they're overly street. It's unnecessary. To me, anyway. I just…it's very like homogenous at the moment…A lot of it now, I listen to it and it's just so samey. Everyone's just doing the same thing; talking about the same things; talking in the same way. You know. It just gets boring. That's what I mean there's no longevity in that though. It's just kind of for the moment.

Rappers who follow some sort of template are of course going to sound similar because they are representing similar images of themselves and referencing analogous topics. Although Efeks suggests this is a particular phenomenon at the moment, it is arguable this has always been the case, but as the scene is evolving and changing, issues around authenticity have been heightened so it feels as though it is a relatively new occurrence.

Jam Baxter (27) believes the conventional or 'purist' notion of having to experience hardship, commonly associated with being working-class is dissipating somewhat:

> There is this preconceived idea, like different definitions of keeping it real, there is this idea that in order to be accepted in that certain world then you have to have lived through certain things or been through certain things but I think that idea is dissolving a little bit in a way, with like you say of the sprawling out of the entire scene and the diversification of it, that is crumbling slightly…There is this idea you have to project this more deprived inner city, council flat kind of like persona in order to gain credence and credibility in the scene. But I've personally never been impressed by that or been draw to artists that talk about that because it seems cool in a way. I've never felt like that particularly was important…Yeah it's not something that me or anyone I've been working with tries explicitly to project and I would very much advise anyone starting out to *not* do that because in order to get something out of the music, it has to feel really personal to you.

In this passage Jam Baxter clearly distances himself and his crew from rappers who present themselves as being street or hard. He echoes a common feeling that other rappers have expressed about tropes of 'real' hip hop being in decline and 'crumbling' yet acknowledges it still exists. In addition, he states, "The idea that you have to talk about certain things because you think it's deeply nestled in the culture, and so you have to tick these certain boxes is something that people shouldn't feel they need to subscribe to I don't think." In articulating the view "It has to feel really personal to you", Jam Baxter subscribes to the idea of being 'true to oneself', highlighted in the literature (Harkness, 2012).

The most recent album release from female rapper Dekay was with a five-piece band who called themselves 'Dekay and the D'mans'. In an interview she explained, "the music's gone in a more kind of non-conventional direction. Yeah which is alright cos I like a lot of different kinds of music. And er, fuck it man, hip hop is more than just straight up one guy, mic and DJ, although that format is great as well. It can be anything you want really." Dekay is enjoying pushing the boundaries of hip hop and experimenting with different sounds and styles of accompaniment. Although Dekay declares hip hop can be anything you want, it is apparent artists need to beware not to

bend the boundaries too far for fear of alienating listeners and the hip hop community. When I probed her further and asked whether she was worried about being accepted by 'purist' hip hop heads, she replied, "Not really because I can do that as well, as I do that on separate projects. And I've done an EP that's totally beats and that's purist hip hop. But to people like that, I'm doing stuff for them as well. But I'm not just a rapper, I'm a writer as well, and a performer, and I'll do whatever the hell I want you know." Despite pushing boundaries and the emphasis on 'doing what the hell' she wants, Dekay is still aware of, and importantly, catering to, purist stances on hip hop authenticity. It suggests that before experimenting, one has to prove one can make and perform purist rap music to gain credibility and acceptance. It raises the question of whether artists are genuinely pushing boundaries or actually respecting traditions and working within them. However it is possible rappers can respect traditions but not be bound by them.

Potent Whisper (19) had quite a purist stance on what hip hop is and what keepin' it real meant based on the culture's origins, seeing it in almost black and white definitive terms:

> If you're looking at how hip hop is about giving a voice to people, and about fighting oppression and emancipation, then that's real hip hop, as in that's where it came from, that's where it started. That's what hip hop is so if you're keeping it real to that, and you're not doing anything about that then you're not real to hip hop. That's just how I see it logically.

However, when Potent expressed this view at a 'Pro-Cypher' organised by himself and another hip hopper, an event to debate and discuss hip hop related topics, a girl spoke up and challenged him. She declared that as a black person, she found the

oppression narrative problematic and instead viewed hip hop as something dynamic and constantly evolving so found relating it back to the origins unhelpful. Based on the critical realist conceptualisation of authenticity as emergent and dynamic, this objection holds weight as hip hop, the scene, and authenticity are continually evolving. Potent was adamant that experimentation with rap music can go too far and result in it not being hip hop at all: "I think it's great that something like hip hop is able to be perceived and explored in different avenues. But when it's changed so much that its not hip hop, then don't call it hip hop, it's developed into something. If it's developed into something else, then that's cool but its not hip hop." However, it is unclear where the line that demarcates hip hop from non-hip hop is and judging by Potent's firm views, it is different for different people. The issue of what even constitutes hip hop authenticity is contentious among scene participants, making adhering to hip hop conventions even more challenging as it undergoes continual debate.

Rapper Leen (29) admitted that over ten years ago when he was starting out on the London hip hop circuit, he found that rappers produced a particular angry and one-dimensional type of music and because of this, he was not well received as his attitude was "too positive". However, because he wanted to be part of the scene and gain acceptance, he tried to adhere to what he thought was 'real' UK hip hop. He describes a time some years ago,

> Kimba [another rapper] started coming to 'No Long Ting' studios with me and just saw this angry guy. I remember we were working on this brilliant song, brilliant hook, and I wanted to swear on that hook just because it makes it more authentic. And he's a church guy, and I was like how dare I disrespect him? This grown man has left his house and spent the afternoon producing with me and I want to upset the creativity we had made, the piece of musical genius we had put together, I wanted to downgrade it to appease this market that were like, no, you're shit. But I was like, I just want to be one of the boys, one of the rap boys. So we rode out our time in the studio but he was like this guy's got some shit to deal with.

As time progressed, Leen realised he was trying to gain the acceptance of people he increasingly did not respect so forged out on his own, setting up a recording studio and building up a name for himself that way. Now Leen is a highly regarded artist in his own right and hosts the popular monthly open mic night London Lyricist Lounge. However, he is wary of the damage that prescribed ideas of 'good' or 'authentic' hip hop can have: "There's a whole lot of cliqueness, it's obvious. I think it hurts the scene. They're not super willing to embrace anything new." Being tied to specific notions of real hip hop and being resistant to change holds back the scene in many ways and stifles creativity.

Rappers themselves are aware of the struggle, challenges, and contradictions surrounding keeping it real. In this interview extract, Chester P (36) keenly observes the problematic nature of the phrase 'keepin' it real':

> I know what it meant. I know once upon a time if you had a singer on your track or something, you weren't real no more. You weren't allowed to have singers and shit once. Real hip hop meant it was like road, it was hood, you weren't allowed to rap about commercial stuff. That's what it meant but hip hop's the biggest selling music on the planet so it's all pop. So now keeping it real, it's again a perspective thing – real to who? Who is real to what and what is real to who? It's arguable isn't it? It just doesn't make any sense to me. Everyone's real in their own right. For me, if I was to say to someone, 'keep it real', I would be asking them to be themselves, whatever that is. I think if there's a fixed uniform of what real is, then it's not real is it, because it's a fixed uniform that people have to wear to be accepted. Therefore people are going to do that to be accepted, therefore they're not going to be themselves, therefore they're not being real.

Chester P gets at the inherent contradiction in 'keepin' it real': 'keeping' anything is conforming and making something stay the same, in other words, is *in*authentic. Furthermore, Chester raises a key point about the relational aspect of authenticity. Dutton argues authenticity is a 'dimension word', a term "whose meaning remains

uncertain until we know what dimension of referent is being talked about" (Dutton, 2003: 258). As Chester astutely questions, when people say 'keepin' it real', what or who are they referring to? This lies at the heart of this thesis as the various possibilities – oneself, hip hop music, the scene, the 'hip hop nation' (encapsulated in my distinction between 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity') – presents several challenges and tensions that rappers need to manage to keep it real. Wanting to be accepted is a central issue in music and scene culture, with some people craving a sense of belonging that similar tastes in music and fashion can afford, creating what Anderson (1983) termed "imagined communities". The onset of media has further enabled the construction of imagined communities through the blurring of boundaries and people not interacting face to face. Destabilised scene boundaries, in addition to other structural and social changes has caused artists' authenticity to be called into question and arguably made authenticity even more of an issue, with more at stake.

A sense of struggle pervades the London hip hop scene. However as the scene continually evolves and changes, it is less clear what rappers are struggling against. The perceived template that people refer to and either position themselves against or model their actions to, is vague and fuzzy at best, which begs the question of where these rules have come from, who enforces them, and whether they actually exist. It is unclear who, or if, these rules are imposed, creating an imagined gatekeeper that rappers appeal to. Not knowing who or what is being struggled against presents considerable difficulty in living out authenticity. Rather than abide to rules, most of the rappers I encountered believed they made hip hop according to their own standards, the local scene, or the wider hip hop nation, rather than based on purist ideology. One of the particularly dominant forms of purist thinking that still pervades the scene is black legitimacy and white illegitimacy.

5.3 Black versus white

The unique positioning of London as a multicultural and diasporic site of cultural production is significant in the racial politics of UK hip hop. London is an exceptional context in terms of the ethnic mix, configuration of class relations and cultural convergence, making it in many ways particularly conducive to globalised art forms such as hip hop. As Gilroy (1993: 95) notes, London is "an important junction point or crossroads on the webbed pathways of black Atlantic political culture." In contemporary London in the 21st century, it is arguable that traditional divisions around race and class have broken down to some degree, though of course many inequalities persist (Bottero, 2004). Race, often entwined with class, is a persistent feature of identity and culture. Significantly, diverse racial identities have become more visible and hybrid as a result of the prominence of hip hop culture (Giroux, 1997: 8). The destabilisation of race as an authenticity indicator in the London hip hop scene suggests participants are challenging and renegotiating essentialist and fixed notions of authenticity.

Racial boundaries breaking down

Yungun (32), a mixed race rapper, believes the hype surrounding Eminem marked a turning point in hip hop. He suggests white rappers have subsequently been viewed as decreasingly controversial, making race less of a significant issue. He states

> Certainly, black or white doesn't seem to be such an issue of that anymore. I mean, when Eminem came out, the fact he was white was a really big issue. Some people were saying crazy things like he wouldn't have been so famous if

> he wasn't white. It was an issue. No matter what you think of it, it was an issue, the fact that he was white. I don't think it's such an issue nowadays because of Eminem and there's loads of people before him and loads of people since. And like, a rapper, who's white, these days, I don't think people are that bothered.

In agreement, Dekay said "I don't see it as an issue. I don't see it as a issue at all. I mean, it used to be a issue but not any more. I mean, the issue I always had was never about being white, it's always about being female so maybe I would never notice that because I had one that was even worse than that haha!" Interestingly Dekay indicates that being female is potentially more detrimental to one's rap career than being white, which draws attention to the range of struggles experienced in the quest to be authentic, and how they differ for each person.

For some people, racial authenticity has never been an issue either historically or currently, believing hip hop brings people together and even challenges ethnic barriers. Trice (28) said,

> It's fucking bullshit. Everyone knows it, that it originally started, like bringing all cultures together. And then like, its just because in America, oh yeah, we've got like one white rapper, Marshall Mathers, and now like every time you see a new hip hop artist who's white on TV in the UK, it's like he's the new Eminem. No he's not!! There's loads of white rappers, there's loads of like Hispanic rappers, everyone [sigh]...hip hop brings people together. It's just so ridiculous.

Trice's frustration can be read as continuing disbelief at mainstream media's emphasis on race when most hip hoppers have moved beyond such fixed distinctions, especially the ongoing questioning of white legitimacy. However, as Trice is white himself, scholars such as Rodriquez (2006) may level the accusation that he is engaging in colour-blind ideology by downplaying the significance of race, which ignores and thus perpetuates racial inequality, all the while justifying his participation in the appropriated art form of hip hop. On the other hand, it is arguable Trice does not deny

racial differences or inequalities by pointing out there are numerous rappers of differing ethnicities, and his statement is even an indication in his belief that hip hop holds the power to help overcome racial stereotyping and inequality. Trice also hints that the contested nature of race, particularly whiteness, is linked to America's obsession with Eminem. The view that racialised politics was an issue in US hip hop, not UK hip hop was expressed frequently among several artists I spoke to. Simon (25) commented,

> We have definitely changed it to something different. I just think it's hard to get away from but it doesn't really matter…It doesn't even come into it. I don't think people care about the race thing. As I say, they probably do in America but the only experience you have is the lyrics coming over here. I think it's just more accepting in England of multiculturalism. You're going to get a white rapper and a black rapper next to each other and they're not even going to care, they're never going to bring that up are they? Even if they're battling and trying to diss each other, that's not…it's nothing, it just doesn't even come into people's heads.

The 'changing' of hip hop to something different, i.e. localised to the London context, suggests that race politics, like hip hop, are also localised and not treated in the same way. However, it is important to point out once again the exceptionality of London in this regard as the rest of the country is not as multi-cultural or multi-ethnic so racial divisions are likely to be more pronounced elsewhere.

Many rappers eschewed the issue of race in favour of an emphasis on 'skills'. In effect, skills denote how good a rapper is. In my research, skills were judged on different variables depending on whom you spoke to. As well as lyrical content, flow, delivery, originality, word play, and audience interaction, the non-vocal aspect of beats was considered extremely important too. Monsieur Frites (26) held that skill was more important than race or class distinctions:

> I've never, never felt like any kind of divide, like class or racial divide within UK hip hop really. I just think it's like, if you're a good MC, you're a good MC. If you project yourself convincingly, and you're good then it's like, like I don't think in London, it's as – well I'm not from New York but from what I've heard – it's a bit more a segregated society whereas like London is a really integrated society so race and class, like, doesn't really come into it. As long as you're like a good MC then, no one can really tell, if you're a sick MC then you've proved yourself.

This interview extract raises several significant points. Firstly, the exceptionality of London is brought up in terms of being particularly integrated. Secondly, Frites argues being a good MC trumps race and class signifiers, but also the ability "to project yourself convincingly". This statement in many ways seems to go against authenticity as 'projecting' anything might suggest actively trying to convey a particular image which is antithetical to 'being true to oneself'. Thirdly, Frites suggests that a 'sick' (slang for good) MC has proved himself. It is arguable that when Monsieur Frites refers to skill, he is using 'good' as a proxy for 'authentic'. This adds another dimension to authenticity being conceived of as emergent and dynamic. The idea that race is unimportant compared to the more authenticity-determining attribute of 'skill' was espoused by numerous rappers, including black rapper Parky (33), "It's based on skills now. That's why you'll always hear them names which I say Chester, Jehst, possibly Skinny. You'll always hear them names when it comes to rap. You'll always hear them names, not because they're white, because they're fucking good. You always hear Blak Twang, you always hear…because man is good." Again, it appears 'good' is being used as a proxy for authentic. In addition, this quote indicates an emphasis on rapper authenticity above hip hop authenticity. As such, a rapper who has successfully negotiated the tensions of making hip hop according to a certain way with their own interests and agenda, are seen as 'good' and therefore authentic.

Racial inequality persisting

If one looked at the surface level of my data, it would appear that the scene is extremely well integrated in terms of race and class, reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of London. When I asked hip hoppers directly about race, they did not consider it an issue at all, even saying it is a "non-issue". Although much of my fieldwork corroborates this stance in terms of the scene being extremely diverse, black rappers standing side by side with white and Asian rappers at open mics and in rap cyphers, there appeared to be a prevailing sense of inequality. High Focus, the most successful label in UK hip hop at the moment, and which has been for the past few years, is run by, and only has, white artists signed to it. This raises several questions as to whether finances and access to resources are race related. Key assets are required to be successful in the scene in order to be able to set up a label, fund it, acquire the business knowhow, purchase and keep up-to-date with latest media, technology and social networks *and* be able to make a living from it. Although hip hop is heralded as fundamentally democratic in that it has the potential to give the marginalised a voice, or as Benny Diction (29) put it, "anyone can do it, all you need is a pad and pen", the reality is that to get your music heard, you need a certain amount of money and resources. One rapper conceded, "well, okay you just need a crappy computer", completely oblivious to the fact that not everyone has a computer or internet access. Dekay, a working-class rapper who was homeless during her teenage years, does not have a laptop. She finds out about gigs and events on Facebook using her phone and was only able to record her latest album through the support of a musical social enterprise project 'Camden Calling'. The ongoing conditions of change discussed in Chapter 4 can make contemporary society a challenging place in which to live out authenticity, giving rise to a potentially confusing, though also possibly emancipatory, context for rappers making hip hop.

One rapper I spoke to felt UK hip hop was "institutionally racist or at least institutionally snobbish". When probed further, Leen, whose story we have heard from earlier, revealed that ten years ago when he was entering the scene, white artists had been quite hostile towards him as his music was upbeat and positive, which did not fit with the gritty and dark sound and lyrics of UK hip hop at the time. After doing the rounds at various hip hop nights in a bid to try and prove himself, Leen became frustrated and exasperated,

> They've been telling me I'm shit for two years, I've been training hard, I've been down at the cypher, I can't be shit so why are you still looking at me like I'm mediocre? It's always that attitude – 'well we expect that from a black guy'. It's like the unwritten code, you're black you're supposed to be able to do this. Then, they start telling me how to rap. Oh, it's got to be about a punch line. No thank you…. That's what I believed happened around '03 to '06, middle-class kids from the suburbs started telling us what rap was.

Leen experienced racial prejudice in that because he is black, he was automatically considered to be a good rapper and that it would somehow come more naturally, therefore the bar was raised higher for him. For the white middle-class rappers, Leen had automatic authenticity purely based on his skin tone and thus was the recipient of higher expectations, as if race was also linked to skill level. This example suggests racism has not disappeared, despite the multi-cultural participants of the scene. However, Leen does indicate that this incident happened in the early to mid-2000s, suggesting that is not so much the case now. Either way, this example illustrates the highly contentious and sensitive racial politics of participating in an appropriated cultural form.

As Fraley (2009: 39) has argued, "hip hop renders visible the complexities of racial identities, exposes spaces of racial hybridity, and reveals difficulties involved in the struggle to dismantle essentialist notions of race in favour of more fluid and unstable racial categories." The destablilisation of whiteness or blackness as a foundation of legitimacy in UK hip hop moves away from reductive notions of race towards more fluid identities. Giroux's (1997: 8) view of "racial identities as multiple, porous, complex and shifting" helps us understand the complexity of race and identity in a changing world and thus the challenge of living out authenticity. Although there is still a strong tendency to link authenticity to race in some hip hop communities, particularly in the context of America (Perry, 2004), in the case of the London hip hop scene, colour to a large extent no longer serves as a determinant of authenticity. This is not an example of 'colour-blind' ideology (Rodriques, 2006), as rappers acknowledge and are aware of the music's history. For instance Efeks said, "I'm not under any illusion that it's not black music…that's why I've always sort of been thankful that I haven't really encountered any kind of barriers or whatever. People always just kind of judge me on my ability rather than anything else." Rappers accept other rappers not based on their race but skill level, making authenticity a dynamic and emergent human property rather than essentialist and fixed. However, the legacy of black legitimacy and white illegitimacy (Harrison, 2008), inherited from America, has by no means dissolved completely so presents an ongoing struggle for rappers to negotiate.

Hip hop has the capacity to not only reflect society but also to transform it through human practices. Hip hop's questioning of whiteness and blackness can be seen as a key site for this social transformation. Hip hop practitioners can therefore be linked to other "cultural workers involved in the critical move to deessentialise identity" (Fraley,

2009: 50). Authenticity conceptualised as dialectical, emergent and dynamic gets at the multi-faceted identities of rappers. These artists refuse racial classification as a signifier of authenticity. The rappers appear to contradictorily embrace aspects of marginality yet also resist marginalisation. Understanding authenticity in terms of an ongoing dynamic process of reconciling the irreconcilable (see Wilson 2014), rather than as either fixed or essentialist is helpful in capturing the complexity of the lived experience of rappers who negotiate race, hip hop, and identity.

5.4 Working-class versus middle-class

Hip hop's origins as emerging from the Bronx ghetto has forever associated the music with participants who are lower class. Consequently, authenticity has since been linked with being working-class and experiencing class struggle. The macro social processes highlighted in Chapter 4 that have influenced the changing context of the London scene and British society more widely have also contributed to the destabilisation of fixed notions of class. Beck (1992) argued that we are witnessing a 'de-traditionalisation' of social forms such as class, family, church, gender and so on in late modern society. As Huq (2006) comments, in this 'reflexive modernity' (Beck et al., 1994) characterised by globalisation and migration as well social mobility, it is young people who are the products of these shifts and become important shapers of contemporary cultural forms. Although class relations have not 'transformed' as Beck predicted, they have broken down to a certain degree, though of course inequality is still pervasive. In the London hip hop scene, rappers tended to either reflect this destabilisation through contesting and negotiating class markers, whilst others responded by emphasising and highlighting class boundaries.

A few rappers I spoke to considered class more of an issue than race when it came to authenticity. Yungun, a mixed race rapper, commented "It [race] doesn't really strike me as that relevant. I think it's more the kind of class thing. The class thing is more interesting because I think, class-wise, still, it's not very easy to be credible as a rapper if you're not working-class. I think that, in this country, is more relevant." Others played down the role of class being an important aspect of authenticity. For instance Benny Diction stated, "I think ultimately, these attitudes, they're not really attitudes I've experienced in great quantities." Similarly another rapper said, "I guess if you were like really, overtly posh, you might get some funny looks but I'm sure you would still, if you were sick[40] and you practiced your craft enough, you wouldn't get like, you'd just prove yourself by consistency. Yeah honestly, it's never been an issue for me." Although downplaying the importance of class, this rapper concedes that if you were 'overtly posh' you may be treated with suspicion but that ultimately skill is the most significant determinant of authenticity. The rapper's statement is in many ways a contradiction; class supposedly is not important, yet at the same time is something a rapper will be judged on (initially at least). Rather than understanding authenticity as dogmatic or fixed, it is perhaps better understood as the way in which rappers reconcile the seemingly contradictory positions and practices of making hip hop, such as articulated here.

Dizraeli (30), a white, middle-class rapper contends that "being black and working class would lend me more credibility for sure, no question." He continues "But there's an awful lots of guys coming from a background like mine – I come from a standard middle-class background – that are adopting this whole premise, this whole street slang thing cos it's cool, not cos they need it…They're trying to be a bit blacker and a

[40] Slang meaning good or great. Synonyms include 'awesome', 'wicked' or 'cool'.

bit more working-class, that's part of the thing because hip hop is about struggle." Although he suggests middle-class rappers do not need to pretend they are street to be accepted, Dizraeli still derides them as inauthentic. Here Dizraeli clearly constructs somebody who is not open about their background and pretends to be something they are not, despite themselves. The pervading sense of struggle that permeates the scene is difficult to pinpoint precisely and it appears that rappers are not always sure what exactly it is that they are struggling against. Dizraeli's interview response suggests that he constructs a 'faker', whether he or she exists or not, in order to have something or someone to struggle against. As such, new divisions are being built up as a way of dealing with the ongoing sense of uncertainty and as a means to project oneself as authentic.

Rather than viewing class in the dichotomous form of working-class and middle-class, in 'reflexive modernity', the division is not so clear cut and increasingly blurred. Although inequality undeniably exists, progressively more people are challenging social stratification, making class something negotiated and contested instead of static. In this lengthy interview extract Jam Baxter argued,

> Yeah well you don't have to be poor or from a deprived background to have had problems and struggles in your life. I mean, like a lot of people that I know and some of the people that make music, myself included, I haven't ever been poor and I haven't ever been rich but my parents did alright and I was never going hungry or anything. I've still had real bad problems with drug addiction and so have loads of people around me and I am still surrounded by it in the squat that I live in now and I am living with a whole bunch of fucking scag heads[41]. I have had people close to me die and I have had lost various people. And that is really gut wrenching. Those people that I know that are on anti-depressants and got bi-polar and are all over the place or whatever. Yeah I mean there is this idea in UK hip hop that you have to kind of project an image of struggle and difficulty. I can only really speak of the people that I know their background personally cos I've grown up with them but I wouldn't say there's anyone in High Focus or in Contact Play or the wider thing that try of kind and say they are more deprived

[41] Slang for heroin addicts.

> than they are. With London the way that is, you can live in Highbury with some of the grimmest estates in north London side by side with some beautiful semi-detached houses so even if you've grown up in one of those beautiful semi-detached houses, just being out on the streets in your day to day life and growing up and going to the local comprehensive, you're still exposed to that kind of like grim element of violence. And there are still weird, jittery crack heads roaming the streets and you can observe that squalor and deprived side of society without having been directly involved in it. It still affects you; the energy of it still affects you. That still does channel its way into my music, just from living in London and being out and about all the time cos I love being out and I love the big city and whatnot, you still do just see it everywhere and that does filter down into my music everywhere. I've never felt that I've had to say; you know 'life's been really hard for me' and whatnot like in the sense of financially. I've never lived on an estate and been involved in estate warfare and whatnot but I've seen it. It's not something I feel I need to push but if you look at it in the sense of social commentary then the fact you haven't been in direct involvement in the criminal underbelly of London, doesn't mean you are exempt from being able to talk about it.

Jam Baxter raises several important issues related to class including the exceptionality of London in that it is home to a melting pot of a highly diverse ethnic and socio-economic population living and working in relatively close quarters. Rather than equate middle-class with economic prosperity, and working-class with hardship, Jam Baxter argues against class divisions by suggesting *all* people experience struggle on some level. Jam Baxter's feelings are common to many global hip hop scenes according to Osumare (2001) who coined the term 'connective marginalities' to capture the real and imagined sense of marginality shared by global hip hop participants. This marginalisation was not characterised by class or socio-economic status, nor ethnicity but enduring "displaced social anxieties" and a shared feeling of oppression. Rapping provides a voice to communicate one's own experiences but also a means of social commentary that observes society. In this sense, rap music has an important role in informing us about contemporary society and reflecting back to us its changes.

5.5 Rapper versus self

The data from my fieldwork indicates that there are various levels at which rappers are trying to be authentic in everyday life. As rappers increasingly have divergent professional and personal roles and responsibilities in modern scenes that cannot be separated and demarcated, being authentic can present several seeming contradictions artists have to face. On an individual level, artists need to stay true to their aspirations, integrity and intentions whilst also being honest about their background and circumstances. One rapper articulated the struggle as follows, "it's a juggling act; work and family and then still trying to put my heart and soul into music as well." Some artists are married and have families of their own or have partners who need to be taken into consideration when trying to make a living from music. For instance, earning enough to support them, or family responsibilities, can sometimes get in the way of a rapper's lifestyle, of late nights, drinking and drug use. The lyrics in Micall Parknsun's song 'My Own Worst Enemy' (2013) indicates how the struggle he experiences is internalised with himself:

> I got no cash cos I'm overdrawn
> *Feels like I'm my own worst enemy*
> I should've paid the rent but I bought the draw[42]
> *Feels like I'm my own worst enemy*
> I should be on tour but I'm stuck indoors
> *Feels like I'm my own worst enemy*
> I say that I'm a man but I'm immature
> *Feels like I'm my own worst enemy.*[43]

Parknsun expresses his frustration at not being able to provide for his family or being a well enough known rapper to be on tour. The song title 'My Own Worst Enemy' in itself conveys the challenges Parknsun endures as a rapper, husband, father and even as a man. At the scene level artists need to be authentic to each other and other

[42] 'Draw' is slang for marijuana.
[43] 'My Own Worst Enemy' Lyrics by Micall Parknsun taken from the album *Me, Myself & Akai* (released 2013).

stakeholders in the scene such as fans and promoters to uphold their identity as a rapper yet also maintain a personal life. Then there is hip hop as a genre and music culture which encompasses its history, global manifestations, and American hip hop in particular. In addition, living in the British city of London, means that there are various identity markers such as nationality, ethnicity and class, which are significant but contested facets of life in England.

At an album launch event at the graffiti adorned Vibe Bar on Brick Lane in Shoreditch, I witnessed firsthand the tension between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity. Supporting Fliptrix's release (on High Focus Records) of his album 'Third Eye of the Storm' was rapper Inja with his friend and fellow rapper Skuff, and a DJ accompaniment. Inja is a very energetic and strong live performer, often hired to host various events and battles because of his ability to move a crowd and dynamic performance skills. After performing various well-known and upbeat tracks, he said he was going to talk about something meaningful and close to his heart, his daughter. He rapped a very humorous (joking about being 'Daddy Cool') but obviously sentimental piece about his baby daughter that was highly original and performed well in terms of being engaging and easily audible. However, the song flopped. The audience stopped bopping their heads and looked around, some using the time as an opportunity to head to the bar or outside for a cigarette. Within rapping one verse, Inja realised it was not being received well so told the DJ to cut the track and put on another track, where upon Inja and Skuff broke out into a high tempo and upbeat song about smoking weed, engaging the audience through a call and response of "When I say 'hybrid', you say 'weed'" which the audience happily responded to. I was bewildered as to why the song had flopped and looked around the room to see mainly 18 to 20 year old white males who presumably could not relate to being a father,

despite the fun and humorous way the song was presented. Did the song only appeal to me because I was of a certain demographic, that of late twenties and female? If I mentioned this example to other rappers in interviews, the general response was that you have to play to your crowd. A few even said performing a track like that on a Friday night was a big risk as you should expect a rowdy crowd who are out for some fun rather than an emotional song. Efeks commented that there are certain tracks he would like to perform but they are not made for live performance, they are 'album tracks', "that's stuff we'd sit down at home and listen to". The example highlights a central contradiction in hip hop, that you are meant to be 'true to yourself' and thus authentic, yet also please fans, cater to the scene and appeal to notions of hip hop authenticity more widely. In Inja's case, was he inauthentic because he scrapped the tune and instead performed something that would appeal to the lowest common denominator? Inja did not choose between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity, even though seemingly in opposition. Rather than view Inja's scenario in these fairly simplistic terms, it is useful to think of authenticity as emergent and dynamic which sees Inja in this contradictory and challenging position as reconciling the irreconcilable and thus being authentic.

Personas

Rather than view personas (an assumed role or image displayed in public) as inauthentic or problematic in some way, Yungun regarded it as imperative to have a persona when performing because of the importance of stage presence. For him it is vital not to get on stage in his work clothes, as he wants to look the part. A division between his rapper self and everyday self is thus beneficial for Yungun who sees the different roles in positive terms. This is in contrast to other rappers who considered it

important to have continuity between the various roles one has, one stated, "Basically what I'm trying to do is step on stage and be the exact same person that I am offstage. I'm trying to build towards that with everything I do. Just to make it easier for myself so I don't have to be anything I'm not." Instead of enjoying the freedom or creative license of having a persona, this rapper feels it is challenging having to maintain varying versions of oneself so strives for consistency for himself as well as for the benefit of fans.

The rapper Jam Baxter feels that although he does have a persona, it is not an invented character but rather an exaggerated part of his existing self:

> I wouldn't say it's a different persona from my persona in everyday life. Like I've always got this one friend of mine, Colin, who's always talking about the difference between me as a person and…he's just like "So, when you're being Jam Baxter…" and all this stuff. I'm not 'being him', that's my stage name. That *is* me. But yeah we like to have a lot of fun on stage because we've always thought that if you're having a lot of fun on stage, the crowd picks up on it and it translates over into the crowd and they start having fun as well…But I wouldn't say that I have a stage persona as such that I've worked on and I've thought about in terms of image. I don't try and hide any aspect of myself or push any aspect of myself to the forefront that isn't there. It's not a built up conceived persona, it's just the live element of everything that I do musically and individually and personally.

In this extract Jam Baxter is exemplifying Krims' (2000: 95) theory of 'collapsed identity', whereby for a rapper to achieve credibility and marketability, the 'performer' must be symbolically collapsed onto the 'artist'. This allows the rapper to project himself, and be accepted, *as* the persona and so is "speaking from authentic experience" (Hess, 2005: 298). For Krims, the collapsing of both persona and artist can be seen as a way to 'keep it real'. Hess maps Gilroy's use of the concept of 'double consciousness', (a term borrowed from Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that originally referred to the psychological challenge of reconciling an African

heritage with an American upbringing), onto the conflicting authenticity concerns of hip hop artists. Gilroy suggests that rap music is one of a series of modern black cultural forms that draw special power from 'a doubleness'. This is when artists understand their practice as 'autonomous domain' and "their own position relative to the racial group and of the role of art in mediating individual creativity with social dynamics" (1993: 73). Gilroy's argument attacks either/or stances and allows a dual identity that transcends the constraints of structures and ethnicity, on an ongoing basis. Using Gilroy's doubleness as a theoretical tool, Hess cites the example of rappers employing double consciousness to produce marketable music for mainstream listeners yet maintain a level of authenticity to a place of cultural origin (2005: 298). Rather than understand double consciousness as restricted to the black experience, Hess suggests that performing a consistent identity is crucial for all hip hop artists and in response they "obscure, confuse, or split their identities to subvert the often conflicting standards of authenticity and marketability" (p.298). Another example is the positioning of the ghetto or the street as an indicator of authenticity and as a marketable aspect of a rapper, making the ghetto "simultaneously commodity and safe-haven" as rappers position themselves within mainstream culture (Smith, 1997: 348). Conceptualising authenticity as dialectical and dynamic offers a way of understanding this 'doubleness', where conflicting issues around personas, marketability and an originating culture are not viewed in opposition or as incompatible but several facets of a particular position that is lived out through human practices in everyday life.

Revealing too much of oneself in music

One of the seeming contradictions I came across in the scene was between the emphasis on telling the truth and representing one's reality, encapsulated in phrases such as 'true hip hop' and 'real hip hop' or the 'real shit', with a surprising amount of rappers who were reluctant to be *too* personal or revealing in their music. Dekay admits,

> My first mixtape, I'm glad no one can get their hands on it. It's really fucking personal you know. I think the album yeah, it's not personal as in I'm telling you details, like about stuff, but it is kind of personal because you can tell how I feel about a lot things from that. And erm if you try and hold too much back then the music isn't good. I mean it's like you have to put a little piece of yourself in the music and that's what people want. People don't want to see something that's kind of forced, they actually want a little bit of you and that's what you have to put into it otherwise it ain't going to have the same kind of thing you know.

In this extract Dekay articulates a challenge she finds in writing music that was common to several artists I spoke to. Although it is important in terms of hip hop authenticity to talk about one's own life and experiences, many agreed that music generally is better if artists communicate something meaningful, or as Dekay put it has "a little piece of yourself" in it. However, many rappers found it difficult to navigate the line between being personal with being *too* personal. As Solo Cypher (29) asked, "How much should you reveal?" Reasons why rappers may be concerned to include private matter is for fear of exposing intricate details of family life, personal relationships or wanting to retain some privacy. A concern of Dekay as a battle rapper was that if someone got hold of the mixtape she is referring to which she made when she was 16, they would have a considerable amount of fodder to use against her in a battle. Another rapper confided that he would like his family and friends to be proud of his music but a lot of his material, in his own words, "is ridiculous, talking about wanking and god knows what else." However, he does not let this get in the way, saying his music is for people that do not know him and he does not want to ruin his

creativity by worrying what people who know him will think. This raises various challenges for rappers to negotiate in thinking about who one's audience is and managing their personal life with their rapper life.

Similarly to Dekay, Micall Parknsun believes you have to give something of yourself to fans but this can lead to them mistakenly thinking they know you:

> You're kind of giving insight to the fans, letting them know something about yourself. You are but you're only like letting them know fifty percent, maybe thirty per cent. They don't *really* know you. A lot of these people listen to your record and they think they know you. When rap came out, it was for us to vent our problems, our situations; whatever was going wrong in the world. Public Enemy dealing with the oppression. We've from London, we're from UK – don't get me wrong, we've had poll tax riots, racial riots, 2011 riots that have just happened. Those are things to rap about, to talk about. If you talk about something that involves yourself, it might be a little fraction of your life. People automatically think they know you and know where you're coming from.

It seems as though Parky likes to keep some distance between his 'rapper' self and his 'real' self (indicated by emphasising 'really' know you). Although on the surface it appears as though this division would make a rapper inauthentic, because of the suggestion that each self is different and perhaps incompatible, it is arguable we all have different 'selves' or roles in life, which is symptomatic of late modernity. Therefore authenticity becomes about reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable rather than being one thing or another. Parky's response suggests that because of the complexity of rappers' lives, it is impossible to be able to get a full picture of that person based on their music as it only provides a snippet of the rapper, and it is also significant to note, is a part they have chosen to reveal. The comparison between American hip hop and UK hip hop, in reference to Public Enemy reveals an interesting appeal to localised issues of concerns. Pennycook (2007: 103) argues, "the localization of horizons of significance pulls the ideology of keeping it real back

toward local definitions of what matters." Parky does exactly this by referencing the recent 2011 riots. The theme of struggle arises again in different forms; one's problems and difficulties in everyday life, bigger societal struggles like racism that Parky alluded to, having to manage the tension of how much or what to reveal, and also negotiating fans' expectations of you or thinking they know you.

An ongoing issue and concern about expressing ideas, experiences and views in one's music is that those views might change. When rapping as a teenager, you might not necessarily think twice about posting an offensive or immature video online, not realising that in the digital age, it will be impossible to delete completely later on. For example, when he was 19, the rapper Akala wrote various rap songs, which used the word 'nigga'. Now aged 29, Akala is what is termed a conscious rapper and talks about racism, identity and oppression in his music. Rather than try and deny, renounce or even attempt to delete and take down his rap videos on YouTube, Akala just honestly admits he has simply grown up and educated himself, making him much more authentic in people's eyes than someone who would try to play down or remove the embarrassing videos. This honesty in being able to reconcile the past with the present shows the lived out nature of authenticity as emergent and dialectical.

Managing a day job with being a rapper

Of the rappers I interviewed, only four are able to make a living from their music. However, these are not comfortable salaries, but rather meagre existences usually subsidised by benefits, merchandise, or other streams of cash. For the first time over the past year Jam Baxter has been able to live off his music but only because he does not pay rent:

> Well I live in a squat at the moment, which means I don't pay rent, electricity, water, or anything like that. So my living is free. So no, I don't have a day job anymore but I used to when I was renting. Now I'm at a stage where I can live pretty comfortably off it. Not like, I can't buy new clothes and gadgetry all the time but just eating and getting around and going out and doing things, I can do that yeah.

In another interview, one rapper expressed his concern at UK rappers ever being able to have financially comfortable lives: "Take someone like Fliptrix, and his label [High Focus], they sell a lot of units, hoodies, clothes and rest of it, but has he paid for a mortgage? No. Is he touring Europe and America? Maybe not. He's sort of at the top of the food chain, in the underground scene, so what does that say for the rest of us?". Making music in the changing underground London scene and earning money in the age of digitisation is extremely challenging. Jester Jacobs commented, "That's why people work jobs and rap at night."

To make an album in the first place, one needs a certain amount of capital in order to book a recording studio, press CDs/vinyl, get design work done and so on. Creating an album can take substantial time and artists need to work alongside the process in order to fund it. Once the album is made, it is unlikely artists will be able to make a sufficient income from their music, so the vast majority need to do other types of jobs to have enough to live off. Jester Jacobs conveyed the increasing problem of making money with the prevalence and ease of piracy, "I know from experience, when you just steal an album of music, it might have taken them two years to fund and master and press and you can steal it in three minutes." Even the artists that can make a living from their music are not financially comfortable. Many rappers find it a struggle to work a day job and be a rapper whilst others enjoy a stronger integration between

work life and rapping. Indeed, being a rapper is considered a job in its own right by artists, not merely a hobby or pastime.

Artists who are unable to make a living from hip hop, have day jobs to support themselves which, just from my data set, can vary from office work, to manual labour, education and law. Many rappers I spoke to talked about the difficulty of managing both their rapper identity and work identity as they quite often conflicted. One artist revealed, "it's hard to make yourself sound great about being a big rapper when you're just sat in your office doing work." To get around it, many artists did not tell their work colleagues that they rap, as quite often responses were prejudiced or disparaging. For instance, several different rappers told me that colleagues would make Ali G references and ask whether they are from the Westside (with adjoining hand gesture) indicating a rather narrow view on what hip hop is and the culture surrounding it. Jester Jacobs suggested these types of views could be a result of media, "yeah I think it's really interesting that people have this animosity about it that aren't part of it. I don't know why that is the case. I like to think that we've moved on from that but I think it's to do with how it's presented on television and the internet." Another rapper who coaches football to under-10 year olds prefers the different worlds he inhabits not to mix. The tension caused by needing a day job whilst trying to make it as a rapper results in quite a strong disconnect between work life and rapper life. However, the tension does provide lots of material to write about and express through lyrics with one rapper telling me he's written songs about struggling to be a rapper and maintain a job, where he realises he will probably not make it big so still tries to have fun flitting between a day job and being a rapper.

One rapper, married with three children, revealed after an interview that he was a cleaner because he wanted the flexibility to be able to dedicate more time to hip hop. This demonstrates extreme commitment to his art form but makes one wonder whether it is wholly necessary to work a blue-collar job when other better-paid work would allow him as much flexibility but more money to support his family. It raises the question with many of these artists working 'dead-end' jobs if it is almost to maintain the 'struggling artist' image where not selling out or getting a better-paid job would somehow compromise their rapper identity. In many ways this exhibits Hess's (2005) argument that hip hop inverts mainstream Western values in the sense that it is more desirable to be working-class and poor than well paid and affluent.

In contrast, there are rappers who have day jobs who experience a strong integration between their rapper identity and work identity. Invariably, these artists tended to be teachers who were able to incorporate hip hop into their pedagogy and teaching techniques. Solo Cypher (29), a primary school teacher said,

> I don't think my music compromises my professional position but I can see why other people would see that it would be compromising. I have to be careful in terms of some of the material that I have. But in general terms of being a rapper, I'm quite open about it. It's just a way of communicating. Again, because I work in education, being an artist with words and stuff, that's always seen as quite positive because they're hoping you can bring what you know through that – this is what I say in interviews – what I do as an artist will be influential in the way I can teach. I can put ideas and information across and explain to people hopefully how they can express themselves in different ways through that.

Solo Cypher did not see any need to hide his rapper identity and even highlighted it in interviews as an advantageous attribute as a creative form of expression that he could utilise in the class room. When I asked Benny Diction, another rapper and teacher, whether he was concerned his primary school aged students would see his music

videos, he replied, “it does cross my mind but it’s not something I’m particularly worried about. I just enjoy it too much to let that be a massive concern.” Navigating the tension of needing to work a day job whilst being a rapper by night is less arduous for those who are able to incorporate their rapper identity at work.

In the contemporary London hip hop scene, a rapper is also a musician, professional, entrepreneur, performer, scene member, promoter, and so on which can result in contradictory and conflicting roles. The multiple stratified levels rappers operate on result in contradictions and struggles they need to manage, which will be explored in the following chapter on ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’.

5.6 Underground versus mainstream

As discussed previously, most rappers in the London hip hop scene can be understood as ‘underground’. For many, this is intentional, a stance taken in opposition against ‘the mainstream’ and what is perceived as evil corporations. There are also a few who are simply amateurs and have not ‘made it’ yet. For others still, it is not a matter of choice, but an indication of the political economy of UK hip hop and its lack of commercial interest and success. Dekay stated,

> If anyone has this kind daydream of an underground rapper living a great life, going about doing stuff, then - it's fucking shit being broke, it is. And I don't see how anyone would ever not want to be signed if it was going to make them some money. I've been living like this for so fucking long and struggling. You know I wouldn't change, I wouldn't make a pop record just to get money but I would love to be signed and not have to fucking struggle to find travel money to go to events cos you don't get paid for most of the gigs, you get paid for some. Even then it's not a vast amount of money and you don't get paid for battles either. It's just fucking peak [rubbish] cos you have to do everything yourself and unless you're lucky enough to have some money or a good job then it's fucking hard you know.

Dekay articulates the struggle she experiences on a day-to-day level with not even being able to afford to travel to the gigs she performs at, so strongly desires a record deal. In contrast to rappers such as Stig of the Dump (31) who are ideologically anti-capitalist and strive for independent and underground status, Dekay desires major label support and money, though is quick to point out she would not compromise her artistic integrity to make a 'pop record'. Although she argues she is not trying to be underground and authentic based on ideological grounds, Dekay maintains an authentic position through her portrayal of being a struggling artist. It is unclear whether she unconsciously continues to live the difficult life she is leading, genuinely believing there is no alternative, or to what extent she perpetuates a belief in the struggling artist to maintain authenticity. Beliefs in authenticity, then, can encourage rappers to act in certain ways whether consciously or unconsciously, which in turn arguably perpetuate particular ideas on authenticity in the scene.

Earning money is a continual challenge for underground artists. Artists have to stump up the costs of making and producing an album themselves, only to give it away largely for free because there is not much of a market and consumers can be unwilling to part with cash for unknown artists. Potent Whisper, for example, informed me of how much he has spent to launch his rap career, "I put everything out for free. If I look at how much money I've spent up until this day on making music, it's definitely grands and grands. Probably realistically five or six grand." Potent Whisper's website allows you to download his music (an entire album or single tracks) for free with an optional donation option, however most people do not make a contribution. The option to a make a contribution can work in other contexts though. At the beat-boxer Shlomo's (28) gig, the audience were invited to 'name your price' on CDs they were selling at the end of the show. The crowd, still hyped and buzzing from the lively

performance, were willing to pay over the odds for what turned out to be a three track CD and not what many of us assumed was an album. The ‘name your price’ economic model appears to be increasingly dominant in the hip hop scene and is moving online too, with consumers able to enter optional figures instead of paying a set price. Paying according to what you think the music is worth, and how much you can afford, suggests a fair payment system but quite often results in the underground or unsigned artist not getting their money back and certainly not earning enough to live off.

It is not an uncommon sight at music venues where hip hop gigs are taking place to see rappers selling their CDs to queues of people or smokers standing outside. Targeting specific hip hop fans and playing them one’s music on an iPod allows consumers to try before they buy and can result in sales or at least a few more followers on Twitter and Facebook. Over the course of my fieldwork I saw quite a few rappers attempting this method to garner more listeners and sales, some even braving the weather when it was minus degrees and lightly snowing. I always expected to see them inside for the show but never did, indicating they came primarily to sell CDs. The struggle in getting consumers to part with their cash is not just limited to the online world, as quite often I saw hip hop heads bartering over the price outside shows, on one occasion seeing a rapper be haggled down from £5 to receiving just £1 for his album.

The stress and difficulty caused by the tension of wanting to make music but not getting paid expresses itself in various ways. For Efeks and Steady, they wrote a song about it called ‘STRESS’, venting their frustration at being in the rap game for ten years and struggling to make ends meet and support their families. In contrast, Stig,

though moaning, is adamant that he prefers not getting paid in hip hop to a paid job he dislikes:

> I have put more hours into learning how to rap than my friend who's an engineer has put into learning how to be an engineer. I work the second I wake up to the second I go to sleep with time out for eating and the gym. Hip hop is my life. It's quite scary to think that sometimes when I hate it. If you take every hour that I've worked on making music and every pound I've ever earnt, I'm probably on under a penny an hour. So fucking what? I'm not working in a call centre and working for someone else.

Stig's extreme dedication to hip hop and his identity as a rapper is central to his existence and despite not getting well paid, he would not want to do anything else. Although there is a tension between creating a product and not receiving financial payment for its consumption, Stig enjoys his autonomy, creative expression and a profound integration between his rap career and everyday life.

Creativity versus business

A central feature of the reccurring challenge of making money in an underground scene is the tension of needing to be business orientated whilst creative at the same time. Although in many ways this is a false dichotomy, this tension was articulated in various ways throughout the scene, sometimes explicitly and other times implicitly. Efeks sums up most UK rappers feelings regarding needing to be business savvy:

> Making music, that's the easy part and that's the fun part. The creative process is…that's the beauty of it. That's why you do it. You get the rush from it. And then, when you get to the point where you've got to put that release out, you've got to promote it and you don't have a team around you, doing stuff like that for you and you're doing it off your own back, and you're trying to do it in between everything else that you've got to do, then that's when it gets difficult, you know? And that's the horrible side of independent music. The thing is, people that are popular and that, a lot of the people, they do the promotion for them. Put something out on the internet and then everyone just starts sharing it. So, like,

> they do the work for you. But, if you're not a big name, it's not going to happen. You're fighting against thousands of other people, yeah, that are badgering people as well going, 'Watch my video. This is my tune. Download my latest.' And it's just like crabs in a barrel. Everybody's fighting for that sort of, that spotlight. So, yeah, it's just…you've got to just carry on. Some people don't …they fall off after a while cause they just think it's too much hard work.

Not only is it a challenge learning how to promote and execute a successful sales launch oneself, but fitting it in between everything else one has to do on a day to day basis, whether that is holding down a job, supporting a family, maintaining a relationship and so on, makes it even more arduous and demanding. In addition, as the scene is relatively small then in many respects rappers are competing against their colleagues and friends even. Many artists did not consider the business and commercial side of making music when starting to rap.

The desire and need to garner interest and fans, with the hope it translates into sales, is so ingrained that some open mic nights allow rappers to deliver a speech resembling a sales pitch after their performance. At London Lyricist Lounge, one of the most vibrant and popular open mic nights, following performances Leen asks rappers where the audience can find out more about them.

Figure 1. London Lyricist Lounge Flyer

Rappers can utilise the 30 seconds to one minute to their advantage by listing their various online profiles or say they have CDs with them for sale. Some clearly dislike the sales pitch so say nothing at all or something vague, such as 'Find me on YouTube'. At the culmination of the creative process – performing to an audience on

stage – rappers still need to have their business head on. It was commonplace for rappers to hand out business cards with their name and online presence information or email to members of the audience following a performance. However, there are rappers who are obviously uncomfortable with selling themselves in this way. At a Suspect Packages event at Vibe Bar in trendy Shoreditch, UK rapper Kashmere (30s) had a very different approach to selling his albums. Mid-performance, he stopped the record and instructed the DJ to put on some specific music, whereupon he put on an MF Doom style mask.[44] Accompanying strange ethereal sci-fi music, and speaking in a slightly altered voice, Kashmere held up a CD and pronounced, "This is when I have to sell shit". By almost becoming a different person through wearing a mask, Kashmere distanced himself as a musician from that of the salesman.

For artists lucky enough to be signed to an independent label, the perceived tension between music making and the promotional side of things is left to other people. Edward Scissortongue would rather not have to deal with the hassle of marketing and leave it to someone with "a head for business", even if it means getting paid less, "We just leave all the hard work to him [Fliptrix] and he can make more money than us, whatever." Jam Baxter, also on the High Focus record label, articulates his struggle with what he considers the business, and therefore uncreative side of things,

> It's very difficult when you're a creative person to be really organized in that whole business world and actually keep accounts and pay everyone and all that stuff. Part of the reason we've got to this stage is because Fliptrix is very much like that. He can juggle both of those things. It's mind boggling to me how he does it, but he does. I think it's very important to have someone like that behind you. Loads of people in the UK hip hop scene have got really disillusioned and been like, 'fuck this shit, I'm not making any money'. Or been quick to say that there is no money in it at all. But that's because they haven't pushed themselves

[44] MF Doom is an American hip hop artist known for having several stage names and personas. He wears a mask similar to that of super-villain Doctor Doom in the Marvel Comics.

> in that direction. They've just focused on making music and expected it to sell off the back of the strength of the music.

Contrary to other hip hop rappers in the scene complaining about the lack of money making opportunities or the even the impossibility of earning money full stop, Jam Baxter believes if your music is good enough and you put effort in then it is possible. In contrast, Jester Jacobs thinks it is largely down to promotion in getting your name and music heard, which unfortunately depends on money: "It's all about promoting yourself. If you don't promote yourself, you're not going to get heard sadly because it costs money to do that." In a competitive market, attaining any sort of exposure puts an artist ahead of other rappers in the scene. In hip hop, authenticity is used to sell so being seen as keeping it real is an added asset to shifting units (Perry, 2004).

Art over money

Although rappers can complain and lament the lack of earning potential, most are still happy to make hip hop without financial rewards. A lot of discourse justifying continuing to make music 'for the love of hip hop', or it being a 'labour of love', rather than financial gain, functions to authenticate the rapper who puts the artform above profit. Efeks told me,

> It's difficult cos obviously I've got to put time, energy and money into doing it otherwise it's a waste of time. So that's what I'm saying, you've got to do music for the right reasons. You can't expect it to be some cash cow. It ain't for me anyway. So, it is for the love. As clichéd as it sounds, it is. But things have definitely sort of got better for me as an artist. In terms of gigging, features and this, that, and the other, as like compared to maybe sort of like five years ago. But it's just a slow process that's all, especially if you're doing underground music. It's not made for the mainstream anyway. So, it's just about sort of gathering a fan base and just …you've just got to keep going. Cos once you sort of start the ball rolling, that's it. You've got to keep going and you've got to keep putting music out, stay out there.

It is a struggle to make music, gig, feature on other people's tracks, and demand money in an underground scene where cash is scarce and there's a reliance on a smallish number of fans for support. However, the idea of doing it for the love romanticises in many way the tropes of being a struggling artist, in turn authenticating the rapper because they are so dedicated to their music and not prepared to sell out for the potential of making some money. Stig of the Dump even has the mantra of not selling out tattooed on him with 'Art Over Money' emblazoned on his hand, literally advertising his underground aspirations.

Figure 2. Stig of the Dump tattoo stating 'Art Over Money' on one hand and 'Love Over Everything' on the other.

5.7 Young versus old

The issue of ageing was a topic that kept reoccurring in interviews and whether rap was a "young man's game" or something one could do indefinitely. Rappers acknowledged that hip hop started out as a youth culture but that both fans and artists are maturing, which in turn is being reflected in the music people make. Dizraeli thus believes "hip hop is growing up slowly in fits and starts." For some artists, an internal struggle of whether to stop or keep on going arises. Yungun said,

> I mean music, in general, like, it's a young person's game really. But I'm not sure what…where I fit in anymore in rap. But I do think about it a lot because I think it's just not cool to be like looking like someone's uncle. Rapping, I mean.

> It just looks a bit lame unless you do it tastefully and in the right way. I mean Jay Z still looks and comes across as like youthful and exciting and yeah, and he's playing to an audience of people who literally could be his children, they're like 16 and they're buying his record and they think he's great.

In contrast, for people like Benny Diction, he does not anticipate wanting to make hip hop for teenage audiences but people his own age as that is the music he listens to and enjoys: "I think if the music you make reflects your maturity then you can keep not reinventing, but renewing, yourself. I don't listen to a lot of rappers below the age of 30. Like Pharaoh Monche, Nas, Brother Ali. They're all over thirty. I do like some younger dudes that are about but I do prefer listening to people with a little bit more maturity and life experience behind them." For Jester Jacobs, the time to stop is dependent on whether you have achieved any success: "If you haven't gathered any steam with what you're doing and not well known, it can be pretty depressing to be rapping at an old age. I think you should know a time to throw in the towel and bow out gracefully." For other artists, whether to give up rapping was not even a question to be entertained.

Solo Cypher had no doubts about whether to continue rapping, believing he will go on for as long as he can. He stated, "As long as excitement comes through, I'll keep going. There's no particular reason to stop. I'm hopeful I'll start a family. And then it will be harder to be out every night 'til 2 in the morning rapping on a street corner. Hip hop is a youth culture thing but I'll always enjoy it." Despite admitting hip hop is currently predominantly a youth cultural activity, Solo Cypher does not consider it a reason not to participate, nor becoming a father himself although the late nights will have to be curtailed somewhat. For other artists, being older was considered a distinct advantage, rather than a reason to stop rapping. One rapper commented, "The advantage of being a little bit older, is that you've got more life experience, you've

worked on your craft a little bit more". In an art form where talking about one's own experiences, challenges and triumphs is the norm, being older can be beneficial in terms of lyrical content as well as delivery. Leen also holds being older has other notable advantages, "I do know a number of keen young professionals – Benny Diction, Kimba, Gambit Ace… a lot these guys are over 25, have good solid jobs and they come and contribute." For Leen, being slightly older comes with various benefits, for instance having a stable and secure job means some artists have the means with which to record. This provides a certain amount of freedom because you are not struggling to make a living from it.

The issue of ageing raises several questions in the London hip hop scene. For instance, whether there is or should be a cut-off age for rapping, if lyrics need to represent a rapper's age and/or maturity level, the age of the intended audience, and the ways in which 'making it' (or not) is linked to age. These are all questions related to lived out authenticity and represent various struggles rappers engage with as growing older is a fact of life but people experience and perceive it in different ways. The question of how long one should continue rapping for appears to be linked to one's motivations for making hip hop in the first place. If a rapper is making music to secure a record deal, be famous and make money, if it has not happened by the time they are 40 or 50, they might consider stopping, thinking it is unlikely to happen at all. On the other hand, if rapping is purely about creative expression and not for outward validation or commercial success, then there would be no reason to stop. For many rappers I spoke to, it was important that one's lyrics reflected one's stage in life and that it is not cool, let alone authentic, to be talking about dropping out of school for dealing weed when you are well into your thirties. Micall Parknsun wants to talk about real life or "real shit": "I'm about the real shit. I'm about trying to talk about getting a mortgage, trying

to show the reality of life for these kids man." However that is not to say that some miss their carefree youthful days. Jester Jacobs admitted,

> I wish I could make the sort of music I was making when I first started but I just can't. Everyone get's older, that's the main thing. You just get older and things happen to you that change how you write and what you're trying to say. I think of the guy who wrote my first album because I don't recognise him anymore really… I wrote a song 'Driving Around'. I wish my life was so simple that I could write a song about driving around now, you know?!

As rappers get older, they arguably experience even more struggle and uncertainty through having to bear increasing responsibilities and obligations in everyday life. Being able to communicate and express one's struggles continues as an issue throughout life, but music offers a creative outlet. DeNora (2000) suggests music has a key capacity for individuals to understand the self over the life-course: "In this sense, the past, musically conjured, is a reflexive movement from present to future, the moment-to-moment production of agency in real time" (2000: 66). Through positioning music as embedded in memory, and an embodied continuous process of reflection, DeNora illustrates how individuals can use music to negotiate and map their ageing self in the context of everyday life. Although DeNora is talking about music more generally, in the case of hip hop, where real life experience is valorised, it would seem more authentic for rappers to map themselves as ageing subjects, for instance in Parky talking about mortgages and marriage, than attempt to be hip and cool by incorporating youth cultural referents. Articulating the concerns and struggles of growing older through hip hop, thus, provides a way of maintaining authenticity through dealing with ageing in a direct way rather than denying it or pretending to be different.

5.8 Faker versus real

Quite often rappers define what keepin' it real is, in negative terms, in relation to what is inauthentic (Forman, 2002; McLeod, 1999). For instance, Benny Diction said "You really have to love it – rap and hip hop and making that form of music – you've got to love it. You can't just half-heartedly do it. You can't just do it because you think it's cool. You can't just do it cos your mates do it. You can't just do it because you want to be an internet sensation. So in that sense that's what I mean by coming from a genuine place." In this statement, Benny Diction positions himself against 'fakers' who only do hip hop because it is cool, in contrast to himself who makes hip hop from a genuine place. This was a highly common sentiment expressed by numerous artists in the scene. However, it is quite difficult to pinpoint exactly who these 'fakers' are, and indeed whether they actually exist. It is arguable that the 'inauthentic' or faker provides a protagonist for rappers to struggle against and thus assert their authenticity in opposition to them.

For Dizraeli, keeping it real has become synonymous for struggle, so people feel the need to communicate hardship, even if they have not experienced any in their life:

> 'Keep it real' in hip hop often means just total bullshit. How real is your life? Reality is a synonym for struggle. Hip hop is a genre of music that has presented struggle from the beginning. Keeping it real in hip hop has come to mean talking about struggle and if you haven't experienced struggle in your life then that's not keeping it real, it's just toeing the line, it's just chatting shit, being inauthentic actually. So people talking about the struggle they've experienced, the people that they've stabbed, how dangerous they are as a person, when none of those things are true and they haven't experienced struggle. I know people in UK hip hop that went to the most expensive public schools in the country and have adopted the whole accent and street talk as if that's their reality. That's obviously not keeping it real; it might sound real to the untrained ear.

The statement "reality is a synonym for struggle" is powerful in illustrating a key argument in this thesis, that in a changing context, wrought by effects of globalisation,

capitalism and digitisation, it has become much more difficult to know what (or whom) one is struggling against. In turn, the rappers often assert a position in opposition to the 'inauthentic' even if they are unsure of whom these are exactly. Authenticity could be seen then to be important to rappers to the extent that it allows them to assert they *are* struggling (and therefore keepin' it real). This, in turn forms an ongoing and potentially vicious cycle.

Rappers who conform to particular tropes of 'hip hop authenticity' run the risk of being viewed by other artists as the epitome of inauthenticity. Dizraeli stated,

> There's a thing in hip hop of rappers doing it to impress. Rappers expressing to impress really. All these guys rapping at the camera, 'I smoke loads of weed, get really drunk, I'm really dangerous.' And then it's the same thing repeated rapper after rapper. Technical ability is there but when you peel away all the boxes that have been ticked, it's like ok, so what of *you* is there? What have you told me that is new? I already know that you want to be seen as dangerous and that you smoke weed cos everyone fucking smokes weed and maybe you take drugs too, like woah crazy! But yeah what of you is there?

Rappers can convey a life of struggle or attempt to portray a subversive identity by referencing drugs. Smoking weed is a common trope in hip hop (Butler, 2004; Kitwana, 2003; Perry, 2004), and is referenced continually in the London hip hop scene, in live shows, lyrics and online. References to drugs in lyrics can serve multiple purposes. On an immediate level it demonstrates affiliation and allegiance with a community where that activity is commonplace. As Harrison (2009) states: "Legitimate participation within underground hip hop is contingent on individuals having certain (subculturally valued) experiences, competencies, sensibilities, and outlooks." Talking about drugs is also a fairly safe way of communicating you are subversive or rebellious in some way because it is illegal, despite many people experimenting with marijuana at some stage in their lives. An additional function of

referencing drugs, addiction or hardship on the part of white rappers is to represent an image of themselves as experiencing class struggle in order to counter depictions of white privilege (Hess, 2005). Demonstrating a sense of struggle against an other, however vague or soft, or even not specifying who the 'other' is, is thus important for rappers wanting to be considered authentic.

5.9 Conclusion

The overarching story of struggle in the London hip hop scene has significant implications for rappers, and arguably young people more generally. Struggle has a relational element to it in hip hop, in the sense that is requires there to be something to struggle against. The 'inauthentic' or 'faker' (real or imagined) provides a protagonist to struggle against, allowing rappers to affirm their own authenticity. However, in this changing context where effects of globalisation, migration, capitalism and digitisation are still being played out, it is less clear-cut what or who the struggler is struggling against, making it more difficult than ever to be authentic.

In the increasingly confused context where the 'rules' are far from clear or even dissipating somewhat, multiple strands come together to give rise to an emergent authenticity. The changing nature of the world challenges a static conception of authentic that is bound to outdated rules or is essentialist in nature. However, as we have seen essentialist or 'rules-based' notions of authenticity continue, for instance, in the struggle to innovate and experiment, in race and class signifiers, in the tension between underground and mainstream music, and even with age. The multiple stratified levels rappers operate at result in contradictions and struggles they need to manage and prioritise. They are not able to choose between them – for instance hip

hop authenticity as opposed to rapper authenticity – since their lot is always to live with both of them, even when seemingly they are in opposition. Instead of seeing authenticity as an impossible ideal, the nature of authenticity as lived out on a day-to-day basis is one where artists/musicians/rappers seek to reconcile different aspects of themselves on an emergent and dialectical basis (see Wilson, 2014). Rappers have developed various 'strategies' and 'tactics' to deal with these struggles and contradictions. We get a better sense of how rappers negotiate their 'lived out' authenticity from studying just how such strategies/tactics are employed on a day-to-day basis. This is the subject of the penultimate chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Lived Out Authenticity: 'Strategies' and 'Tactics'

> In global and societal contexts characterised by social pluralism, rapid change, movements of people, increasing cultural contacts, and struggles for self-meaning, authenticity emerges as a definitive challenge.
>
> Weigert (2009: 40)

6.1 Introduction

In the changing and confusing context of the London hip hop scene, which as we have seen is undergoing cultural, technological, and socio-economic shifts; it is arguably more difficult than ever to 'keep it real'. In the previous chapter we heard about the differing and wide-ranging struggles rappers encounter in the scene and the tensions they are required to manage ranging from innovation and convention to race, class, age and being underground. Negotiating these various struggles on a day-to-day to basis requires rappers to develop strategic and tactical approaches to help those involved live out authenticity in contemporary society. Based on the data I have collected these 'strategies' and 'tactics' can be broadly categorised according to a number of distinctive features – namely, stratified integration, oppositionist positioning, universal commonality, historical affiliation, radical individualism, explicit claims, and (social) media management. This chapter explains the conceptual framework behind the strategies and tactics, and then introduces each of the strategies/tactics, in turn.

6.2 'Strategies' and 'Tactics'

As mapped out in previous chapters, the current context of the London hip hop scene in the 21st century is increasingly complex, individualistic and to a considerable extent governed by neoliberal agendas. Neoliberalism encompasses not only political and economic principles that champion private property rights and the free market (Harvey, 2005), but extends to individual citizens who are constructed as entrepreneurs of themselves and their lives and are encouraged to be competitive and commercial in their behaviour (Gilbert, 2013). Rappers in the scene need to juggle various aspects of their lives ranging from their work and family, to considering the local, global and historical aspects of making hip hop. All this makes 'living out' authenticity a complicated challenge. Arguably, all of us have to function at multiple levels, assuming different and sometimes competing roles in life. In this chapter we explore how rappers have developed various approaches to deal with their ensuing sense of struggle (some of which may also be common to young people more generally). As a way to negotiate authenticity in a changing and challenging context, rappers employ different practices, or what I call 'strategies' and 'tactics', to manage the challenges and contradictions in their lives. I am basing my conceptualisation of 'strategies' and 'tactics' on the work of Peterson (2005) and de Certeau (1988).

To understand how musicians develop strategic responses to authenticity, it is helpful to draw again on Richard A. Peterson's work on authenticity in country music. Peterson (2005: 1086) argues that as authenticity is constructed and subject to continual change, then it must require effort to appear authentic. He called this 'authenticity work' and suggested it takes a number of forms. In his article *In Search of Authenticity* (2005), Peterson specifies six types of authenticity work: authenticity through ethnic/cultural identity; the elasticity of group membership; authenticity through status identity; seeking authentic experience; technologically mediated

authenticity; and authenticity to constructed self. In these six spheres, authenticity is claimed "by or for someone, a thing or performance, which is either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (Peterson, 2005: 1086).

Although I will be drawing on Peterson's theory of 'authenticity work', I will be departing from it in several crucial ways. Peterson explicitly argues authenticity is socially constructed, which, according to the meta-theoretical framework of critical realism, only accounts for a partial understanding of authenticity. It is important to move beyond the level of discourse as this gets at the 'lived' (practised) nature of authenticity. In addition, what people say can be quite different from what they do and it is this inconsistency that is interesting and reveals what authenticity is and how it is negotiated. This 'negotiation' can be conscious and deliberate, or unconscious and tactical (see de Certeau 1988). Some rappers act according to perceived codes of behaviour and norms while others are just muddling through, figuring things out and making decisions as they go along. Another distinction from Peterson's approach is that he based his research on the production of culture perspective, looking at the roles of industries and institutions in fabricating authenticity country music. He argued that the music industry ultimately determines what is authentic despite decisions appearing to satisfy fan tastes, as in practice they actually satisfy the next gatekeeper in the decision chain (Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Ryan, 1983). Conversely, in the case of the London hip hop scene, authenticity is very much bottom up, in keeping with the underground nature of the scene and absence of music industry executives. Lastly, As Peterson was looking at the history of country music (1920s to 1990s); he used archival methods rather than speak to artists and fans themselves. By adopting a research angle looking at industry and institutionalisation that focuses on how structures shape music, culture and society; he potentially diminishes the agency of

the artists. In contrast, my research is largely focused on a micro level, exploring the interactions of key agents in the London scene. Although I consider industry and societal structures, the main thrust of the research aims to understand how rappers negotiate authenticity in everyday life. This is necessarily a relational exercise, requiring reflexivity (relations with the self) and working with/against 'others'.

In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), Michel de Certeau makes a helpful distinction between 'strategies' and 'tactics' that can be productively applied to the authenticity practices of rappers in the London scene. For de Certeau, a strategy is "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment" (p.xix). Furthermore, it is "an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible power of the Other" (p.36). This definition fits with the conscious and intentional nature of Peterson's (1997) 'authenticity work'. In the case of the London hip hop scene, the 'Other' de Certeau refers to can be understood as the invisible entity that so many rappers seem to be struggling against, whether structural conditions of society such as capitalism and class or forces of politics and culture. A 'tactic' is defined by de Certeau as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of the tactic is the space of the other" (p.37). De Certeau further states tactics are manoeuvres within enemy territory that "must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities"'(p.xix). Strategies are courses of action that come from a place of power, whereas "a tactic is the art of the weak" (p.37). By using the terms 'strategy' and 'tactic' in relation to the London hip hop scene, I try to account for the practices and coping mechanisms rappers have developed to negotiate the challenges of

everyday life in late modernity whilst striving to 'keep it real'. Basing my conceptualisation on Peterson and de Certeau, I suggest 'strategy' is a conscious and planned approach rappers undertake to negotiate authenticity. In contrast a 'tactic' is subconscious, where rappers are not wholly aware they are behaving in a certain way. The distinction between strategies and tactics also emphasises the 'relational' nature of authenticity. By this I mean there is a reflexive element in that rappers reflexively deliberate how to act (a relationship with the self), as well as consider the relationship with many 'others' (mainstream, working-class, adulthood, market etc.).

The seven practices described below are responses rappers have developed to negotiate authenticity in the London hip hop scene and will be discussed according to whether they are a strategy, tactic or a combination of both. A critical realist meta-theoretical position recognises that social construction plays a significant role in human knowledge and interaction, but argues there is more to understand on a lived, embodied and experiential level. In identifying and isolating the seven strategies/tactics below, I attempt to show how authenticity is *lived out*, in addition to its discursive dimensions. Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that these strategies/tactics are not mutually exclusive but potentially overlap, can be used in conjunction, or even contradict each other.

6.3 Stratified Integration

As I delineated in previous chapters, wider societal shifts and changes such as social mobility, greater flexibility in employment, and digitisation have contributed to a greater sense of fragmentation and uncertainty. While social theorists like Bauman (2005) emphasise the fluidity of identity as something infinitely negotiable,

Buckingham (2008) points out the need and desire within many people for the continuing importance of routine and stability. In the case of the London hip hop scene, it is apparent that rappers find the uncertainty a continual struggle and that many, if not most, seek integration across their stratified identities.

A way to get around the feeling of operating on stratified levels or negotiating multiple roles is to try and make hip hop your full time job, but as we have seen this is extremely difficult in an underground scene in the digital era where it appears there is little money to be made. Parky is one of the few rappers who has managed to establish hip hop as a full-time career:

> As of last year September, I've been one hundred per cent self-employed off this rap shit. I've just been selling beats, trying to do singles obviously, selling merch. The thing is, a lot of people think we make a lot of money off the record itself but we don't. We make money off the gigs. The things we can sell to double up our money afterwards like when I go to shows. At Boom Bap, I'm going to have more t-shirts, more…I'm only making money from that, and obviously I get my fee. That's how I make money at the moment. My wife's my manager and we've got the website, I just try and sell, sell, sell. It's hard but obviously the first two years are hard but this is what I want to do and I'm happy.

Although trying to make a living from hip hop full time is challenging, especially when you have three children to bring up as in Parky's case, he is 'happy' enjoying strong integration between his personal and professional identity. The employment of his wife as his manager further demonstrates integration in his personal relationships and private life with his rapper identity. Parky also demonstrates the strategy of stratified integration through the incorporation of his family in his music for instance featuring his children's voices or laughter on some of his songs.

Stratified integration is successful when rappers experience a strong integration between their day job and being a rapper. For several rappers this is a tactical move,

rather than strategic, because it comes from a place of weakness in that they cannot make a living from hip hop so they have turned to running workshops for youth teaching them to rap, in order to maintain their rapper identity. There is a parallel in the context of entrepreneurship. Here scholars have distinguished between 'necessity' and 'opportunity' entrepreneurship, with the former being when those involved have no choice but to set up their own enterprises as there is no work, and the latter describe those who take advantage of opportunities. 'Necessity' entrepreneurs can then be understood as acting tactically in trying to overcome their particular marginalised circumstances. Similarly, in the London hip hop scene, rappers act tactically arguably out of necessity. Primary or secondary school teachers who were rappers were able to incorporate hip hop into their pedagogy and teaching techniques so felt less of the unease or struggle in trying to reconcile different parts of themselves. The rapper Solo Cypher said, "what I do as an artist will be influential in the way I can teach. I can put ideas and information across and explain to people hopefully how they can express themselves in different ways." However, it also works the other way as Solo Cypher experienced at a hip hop night where other rappers welcomed and celebrated his honesty regarding his job and work life, "I've been in cyphers and I generally try and be as honest as I can. There's a video of me at London Lyricist Lounge and I'm like 'I don't sell crack, blah, cos I'm a teacher.' And everyone went 'yeaaaah!' All these guys they might be rapping a lot more street and a lot more hard but they're rapping about their lives. I'm coming across and saying about my life and they respect that, I respect them."

I interviewed Yungun, a full-time media lawyer, in Bloomsbury over his lunch break. He was wearing a suit but had removed his tie and unbuttoned the top few buttons of his pinstriped shirt. Unlike most of the rappers I had talked to, he wanted to keep his

day job: “I like to mix and match and be doing different things all at the same time. So I really enjoy doing music and being a lawyer at the same time… But I don’t see this as a second best thing or a ‘Plan B’. It’s kind of like, it was my Plan A actually all the way along, to become a lawyer and kind of do a bit of business with entertainment stuff.” Here, stratified integration can be seen as a ‘strategy’ in that Yungun planned his career to become a full-time lawyer so his approach is coming from a position of power and is deliberate. Rather than negotiate the tension of having to wear multiple hats or maintain several seemingly contradictory identities, Yungun enjoys doing different projects. However, this could be because they are not as conflicting as they appear; he has focused on media law, including music, which is linked to being a practicing artist, and in addition, he is now more financially and professionally stable to continue his music at an advanced level. He says, “in the last year or two, I’m a bit more established as a lawyer and got the hang of it, and I can do music on top of it more easily now.” He has also built a studio in his house so he can record vocals and work on music when it suits him: “I have over a couple of years developed like more of a self-sufficiency where I can actually just do more of it myself in the weird, random pockets of spare time that I have, which might be late at night or it might be first thing in the morning. Like this morning, I was doing about a two-hour studio session, basically, before going to work, at home. Or whenever it might be, I just fit it in with the time I’ve got.” Even though Yungun is a successful lawyer and is committed to his career, because of the resources at his disposal, he is still able to maintain his rapper identity, so in many respects integrating hip hop into his everyday life. However, because being a lawyer is his first priority, there can be occasions when he has to balance work and rapping, for instance a gig in China had to be tied in with leave from work to make it possible.

One rapper I spoke to, unable to integrate his work identity and hip hop identity, left rapping behind in order to get a ‘proper’ career with earning potential. This decision can be understood as strategic as he rationalised the decision process and planned ahead. Despite his album being voted one of the top ten UK hip hop albums in 2010, he came to a point in his life where he realised that rapping wasn’t paying the bills so he decided to focus on getting a ‘proper’ career and then consider returning to rapping later on when he had more money and resources to devote to it. Before the change in focus, Jonny said that hip hop completely dominated his life, “Like literally, if you weren't listening to hip hop, you were rapping hip hop, if you weren't rapping or listening to it, you were talking about it. Just really proper loved it.” Jonny attributes his white, middle-class upbringing to re-evaluating the priorities in his life:

> I was scared of hitting a certain age and looking back and thinking 'fuck' basically. That's being really honest. I think it's to do with the way I was brought up as well sort of thing. If I'd probably grown up around hip hop and had more access to it and hadn't come from such a middle-class background, or whatever, where careers are deemed like your number one priority then it probably wouldn't have rubbed off. Where up to a point, and I did have to make the choice, I could carry on like living a certain way and doing a certain thing and having that time and being in that mind frame to rap, rap, rap or I could cut it for a while and see if it comes back and put something else as a priority.

The difficulties of trying to make a living from hip hop and hold down a day job became too cumbersome and conflicting for Jonny so he made the difficult decision to stop rapping and build a career with earning potential. This clearly highlights the precarious nature and instability of UK hip hop as providing a means of income for its cultural and creative workers and the reality of the choices and compromises artists have to make regarding ‘keepin’ it real’ in their everyday lived out lives.

6.4 Oppositionist Positioning

As we saw in the previous chapter, rappers tend to position themselves against the 'inauthentic' and need some sort of protagonist to struggle against (real or imaginary). Oppositionist positioning can manifest itself in various ways, through the use of mainstream or commercial rhetoric, towards other rappers who may have different values from oneself (i.e. gangster or misogynist when you consider yourself conscious), and incriminating fakers, but also in less conscious ways such as identifying as being different from others in the scene.

Rappers often position themselves against those perceived as inauthentic in varying formats such as via what they say and do onstage, who they affiliate with, how they behave online, and also in their lyrics. In this context, oppositionist positioning is then strategic in that rappers intentionally and knowingly carry out this practice, though often it can come from a place of weakness. The track 'What is real?' (2010) by Akala clearly illustrates his positioning against 'fake' rappers:

> Sorry, if I don't dance enough for the radio to play my stuff,
> And got no girls in the video playing the city ho loco shakin' their butts
> I thought rap was about content, I see now that's just nonsense
> We judge MCs by the Bentleys, and how much they can have no conscience
> How many chains can you wear, and not care, the cost of a village somewhere,
> Stones of begets, slowly forget, this ain't the first time there were chains on your neck,
> It was much worse, choose to accept, but now vexed, just perplexed[45]

The lyrics convey a strong sense of contempt for rappers who place making money or other unsavoury values before the content and artistry of hip hop, which Akala hints is the reason his music does not get any radio play. He suggests that in this age of capitalism and increasing consumerism, we value rappers by what they wear and the

[45] 'What is Real?' lyrics by Akala from album *Doublethink* (released in 2010) on Illa State Records. Full lyrics of track here:
http://rapgenius.com/Akala-what-is-real-lyrics

car they drive rather than their skill and ability. The reference to "chains on your neck" alludes to the use of chains in slavery, whereas chains are now status symbols and an indicator of wealth. The song clearly aims to demarcate Akala from what he accuses other rappers of doing. This internal struggle within the scene against people perceived as exploiting hip hop can be interpreted as symptomatic of the wider struggles rappers are experiencing in society. As the scene continues to change according to macro societal, cultural and economic processes, it has become less clear-cut whom one is struggling against. In not being able to pinpoint exactly who is responsible for making rappers feel the sense of confusion and exclusion they do, it is possible they turn on each other as an attempt to counter the struggles they negotiate on a daily basis.

A less conscious or tactical form of oppositionist positioning is the feeling of being different in some way and not fitting in with the scene, which was a sentiment conveyed to me in many interviews. Several rappers felt they were unique in some way; their outlook on life, background or approach to making music made them distinct. By classifying themselves as being different or even special, rappers cast themselves as authentic against 'inauthentic' others. To give an example, from having a father in the army, which meant the family moved every four or five years, to his struggles being temporarily homeless as an adult, Stig has always felt that he is different from a lot of people:

> When I was homeless for a while and went through that bullshit, it made me realise I'm not mentally – my philosophy, my outlook, my beliefs – aren't keeping with most of society. For that reason, I've kind of opted out a bit, not fully. I never want to be a 9-5er.

Feeling different or an outsider is what attracted Stig to hip hop, "Hip hop has always been the voice of the oppressed and the outsider. I was an outsider everywhere I went, so connected with hip hop." In identifying as an outsider, Stig legitimises his participation in hip hop culture which has allowed him to express his struggles in life. Jester Jacobs also feels different to others, but took a while to embrace and acknowledge it in his music,

> I just like to embrace things about my personality that make me different to everyone else. I see that as a strength…As I got older, I realised all the things that I see as weaknesses like my background, where I grew up, the things I do, I realised that they can be positives, as long as you embrace them. You know, like, Dizzee came out at the same time as The Streets[46], two completely different people make two completely different styles of music but both are honest and genuine and both are successful because of that.

Purposefully viewing oneself as different in some way and turning it into a unique or positive advantage is a personal strategy to cope with struggle that also tackles the myriad authenticity conventions discussed in the previous chapter. If one does not fit the prescriptive 'rules' of authenticity such as being black, working-class or making 'old skool' music (McLeod, 1999), then differentiation is an effective means by which to turn it into a positive attribute. Oppositionist positioning allows rappers who do not fit the mould or 'rules' to manage the tension of hip hop authenticity over rapper authenticity.

6.5 Universal Commonality

What I have termed 'universal commonality' is a tactic rappers largely unconsciously employ to suggest we are all the same. We should therefore not differentiate between

[46] Dizzee Rascal is a black, working-class rapper from East London and Mike Skinner of 'The Streets' is a white middle-class rapper from Birmingham.

certain traits because as human beings we all share the same fears, doubts, and vulnerabilities. By stating we are all human beings and thus the same, the tactic builds a bridge that contests many of the struggles that rappers experience, for instance class, race, age and also place, such as the local versus the global as it brings us altogether as 'humankind'. By taking away the threat of individual differences, universal commonality creates a stronger sense of community, belonging, and crucially acceptance. Universal commonality is also ahistorical in that it connects us, in terms of hip hop, to the originators of the culture and music, therefore depleting the potency of notions of historical authenticity and debates about the origins of hip hop.

Asserting universal commonality unwittingly has the function of suggesting that people of diverse national, ethnic, cultural, religious and class backgrounds are all the same and that there is no need to distinguish between or highlight differences. For rappers managing the black versus white tension, they may invoke universal commonality through implying all humans are one species, and that colour does not matter, in a bid to downplay their whiteness or whatever race they may be. In negotiating the ongoing debate about who is authorised to make hip hop, which as we have seen is mostly based on American notions of authenticity, rappers frequently argue that hip hop is open to everyone to participate. One rapper in an interview said,

> Now it's performed by everyone and I think it's just like, it's just like a method of expressing yourself, I don't think it can be like seen as belonging to any aspect of society cos anybody can do it. It's just like singing or anything like that, anybody can teach themselves to do it. And as long as you're respectful to where it comes from and you like, er, study your craft and how the music's evolved and respect where it came from, then I think then anyone can do it.

By arguing that anyone can make hip hop, the rapper arguably justifies his participation in a music that has its origins and history far removed from

contemporary London. This mirrors Maxwell's findings in the Sydney hip hop scene in Australia where rappers defined "authenticity not deriving from colour or race, but from a notion of truthfulness to one's self" (Maxwell, 2003: 161). This underscores the emergent and relational nature of authenticity, rather than it being something fixed and essentialised.

In an interview, Jester Jacobs illustrated how compelling the idea of universal commonality is in bringing understanding to others thought to be different to ourselves:

> There's a quote on my first album from Louis Theroux[47]. Not sure if you've heard it where he is basically talking to this rapper in Texas somewhere. The guy just says 'Look, we are all the same. I might talk about hoes or guns or whatever and you might like it but don't try and do what I do. You can talk about you being Louis, life in London and I will find that fascinating because that's a world apart from anything I know and that would be interesting to me.' And I completely agree with it because I listen to the most lunatic, rude boy music, grime music, all kinds of hip hop from all around the world and it's just fascinating having a window into other people's lives.

This example is interesting because on the one hand it conveys we are all human beings ("we are all the same") and that is why we are interested in other people as it might teach us something about ourselves, yet on the other hand, suggests that we lead distinctly different lives, which is also why we are so interested in each other. In championing the universal commonalities of human beings, yet acknowledging the differences, Jester Jacobs negotiates the contradictory tensions of making hip hop music and legitimises his participation in it. Authenticity can then be conceived as reconciling the apparently irreconcilable on an ongoing daily basis.

[47] Louis Theroux is a BBC documentary filmmaker who made a documentary on America's South gangsta rap scene, which was aired in 2000. (Series 3; Episode 6).

6.6 Historical Affiliation

Historical affiliation can manifest itself in various ways. One way is through rappers calling on properties of hop hop's history to authenticate themselves. This can be in the form of obvious declarations of paying homage to the 'old skool', making 'boom bap' music, invoking the golden era – either in associating their music with that period or indicating it is their music of choice and thus have superior cultural taste. When rappers present their music or their taste preferences in this manner, they are being strategic rather than tactical as they assert it in deliberate and contrived fashion. These types of affiliation can also be categorised under the strategy 'explicit claims'. Another form of the historical affiliation strategy is through artists asserting their seniority in suggesting they have been around a long time and remember (as well as performed, attended and were heavily involved in) the scene back in the 'old days' or the 'golden era'. This is similar to Peterson's (1997) country musicians who through their ongoing 'authenticity work' constructed narratives positioning themselves in relation to other key artists, places or eras of music. Another manifestation can perhaps be considered a form of nostalgia. Some artists who find it difficult to cope with the changing nature of the scene and society more widely, manage their struggle with harkening back to the past and talking about how hard things have become or that so much has changed.

In an interview, Parky described a UK hip hop history exhibition that was put on in Manchester a few years ago that he was invited to perform at. "I went there and I didn't expect to see my face", he said, surprised at seeing himself in the exhibit. Parky believes it was because he got a record out on a prestigious record label before it folded, "I think it's because what Low Life fucking put out. Me and Dubbledge are

the kind of last of that generation. We kind of just got in there." Even though Parky expresses a degree of surprise and humility at being included in a UK hip hop history exhibition, he still brings it up in a boastful manner, suggesting that he is an important figure in UK hip hop. In referencing this exhibition early on in the interview, Parky points to several key aspects of UK hip hop and his place in it, namely the importance of history in UK hip hop and the significance of lineage. By affiliating himself historically with UK hip hop, Parky firstly contributes to the pervasive sense of continuity and tradition in hip hop and most importantly articulates his elevated status in that historical trajectory.

Within the scene there is a strong sense of history and paying homage to who has gone before you. There is something similar to a 'heritage' that ought be acknowledged and respected, creating in many ways a hierarchy. In an interview Micall Parknsun reflected this perspective when saying, "I'm always up for keeping the bloodline going. Our bloodline was Hijack, Gunshot, Demon Boyz, Rodney P, London Posse, MCD, then from after seeing MCD, I wouldn't have known about Skinnyman." In using the term 'bloodline', Micall Parknsun affiliates himself with, and gives credit to, artists that have gone before him which links him to their heritage and thus with a sense of authenticity. In many ways, this can be read as a strategy to marry rapper authenticity with hip hop authenticity as the rapper locates himself within the canon of historical hip hop to attain authenticity.

Several rappers indicated a resistance to contemporary rap, suggesting 'old skool' or 'boom bap' was vastly superior. For instance Efeks stated, "I don't like a lot of the new sound. I like that sort of dusty, boom bap sound. Like the golden era sound. Like dusty loops and horns." Another rapper stated in a similar tone that hip hop is not

what it used to be, “I think people have kind of lost sight of where hip hop came from and what it really means. And that’s probably why I’m not really into a lot of the new stuff at the moment.” These types of sentiment reveal a feeling of nostalgia for bygone times and a reluctance to accept how things are changing. Invocation of the past and historical affiliation may be a strategy for artists finding the changing context of the London hip hop scene a challenge. Rappers struggling to adapt to the ongoing effects of neoliberalism, digitisation, and globalisation arguably manage the tensions experienced by harkening back to previous times when they felt making music or life more generally was easier. In addition, rappers are themselves getting older so an element of negotiating authenticity is also coming to terms with that change on an ontological and epistemological level (in that we are really changing and our view of ourselves is changing too). Therefore resisting or denying change in the scene and themselves through invoking the past is another way rappers negotiate authenticity.

6.7 Radical Individualism

In the changing context of the London hip hop scene, influenced by the complex inter-related effects of capitalism, globalisation, migration and digitisation, what artists are struggling *against* is becoming less clear-cut. One approach to deal with this confusing and challenging situation is for artists to position themselves against the world, in a sense against everything, as not one specific entity can be singled out. This can be either conscious (a strategy) in terms of articulating a ‘me versus them’ mentality, or subconscious (a tactic), with some artists feeling alienated or different in some way. Authenticity then becomes much more personal. Radical individualist artists are much more likely to emphasise their personal biography and believe they are going against the trend, without perhaps realising that many rappers are doing this,

so are actually perpetuating a certain style and lyrical content because it is believed to authentic.

Making oneself stand out in some way or actively striving to be unique is another aspect of radical individualism. Rappers go about this in varying ways, for instance emphasising particular characteristics of their biography, or the topics they rap about. Parky said in an interview,

> My name is Micall but I thought you know what, I'm a working-class dad, I did do a lot of dumb shit for a young black male growing up in Kilburn, north west London. But I just though nah, I've got kids, let me do it differently. I'm not trying to say let me try and make it conscious, I just thought let me be me. And that's the problem nowadays of all these rappers, they're not being them, they're trying to be someone else. If they actually stopped and just think, yeah so what I live in Hampshire, it doesn't matter. If you live Hampshire, you live Hampshire, cool, rap about something…that's why Leaf Dog's dope. Leaf Dog's got his own style, he's got his own character, his own voice. Make's his own beats and he's from Glastonbury, like he's not from the ghetto, you get me! And he's producing for likes of Big Daddy Kane and KRS-One - icons now! That happens because of originality. Because when people hear something and they identify you know what, this guy is good, he ain't trying to be nothing else and I really feel this shit. Hence why it is what it is man.

Parky released an album titled *The Working Class Dad* (2005) which talks about the struggles of making ends meet whilst bringing up his family so embodies the 'be true to yourself" strand of authenticity often cited in hip hop literature (Harkness, 2012). Dizraeli, coming from a very different background to Parky, takes a

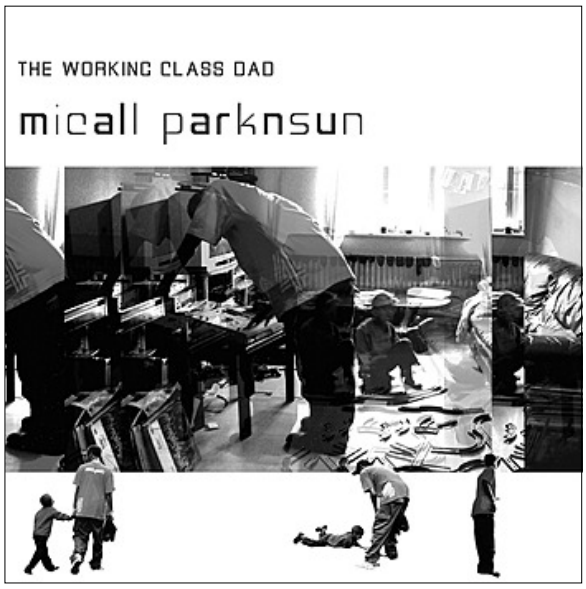


Figure 3. Album cover of *The Working Class Dad* (2005) by Micall Parknsun.

similar approach based on honesty through cultivating an identity that turns his privileged life into a positive attribute,

> And if you dare to stand up and say, sorry guys, I'm white and middle-class, I can't tell you about how difficult it was for me growing up in the gutter but I can tell you about these things that I know, these aspects of humanity that I understand. These things that I've had the privilege to see in my position, I've travelled the world. Here's what I can represent and impart. Everyone has something to offer, everyone is original as fuck! It's not just in our fingerprints that we are completely unique; it's in every aspect of ourselves. Everyone is so original!

Both rappers aim to be honest and open about their lives, as they believe this will make them stand out and be original. In emphasising originality and individualism, the rappers contest the 'rules' of hip hop by suggesting authenticity is extremely personal.

Radical individualism explains why some rappers hold that they are different or unique in some way, or that they go against the grain, making them subversive, rebellious and anti-establishment. However, when several people are rebelling, it ironically becomes conformity and not subversive and individualistic. Efeks stated in an interview,

> You know, like, kind of keeping it real. Like, not selling out to things. That's always going to be there cause it's not about sort of…it wasn't about conforming before, when hip hop first came out. It wasn't about conforming. It was about rebelling really. Speaking out. So, that's what I'm saying. It's about individualism really. So you've got to go out there and do your own thing and it's not about being…trying to be street if you're not.

A rapper who seeks something to rebel against in trying to be counter-cultural and position oneself against the mainstream ends up conforming because that is what everyone else is doing too. Dekay's definition of authenticity can be classified as

radical individualism, "Believe in your music. That's keepin' it real to yourself – what you want to do as an artist, not writing for what you think other people want to hear. That's what I think anyway, not caring what other people think." Although rebelling against the scene, encompassing peers and fans, seems contradictory to other strategies that seek belonging and acceptance, it is arguable this is a response to that need. A mechanism of defence against being excluded is to say you were not making music for those people anyway, or that you do not care whether they like it or not, when in actuality the rappers are likely to be seeking approval.

Stig of the Dump has developed almost a brand for himself around the phrase 'Team Hate'. The tag line across his website and on Twitter is 'Team Hate Member Number 1: FUMusicUK – "There is no ME. There is no YOU. There is only US and THEM…and FUCK THEM."'[48] The 'FUMusic' stands for 'Fuck You Music'. The aggressive attitude presented by these claims indicates a flagrant disregard for other people and their opinions. This is further emphasised in the song 'Hater' (2010) of which the chorus is transcribed below,

> Hate life, hate rap, hate white, hate black,
> Hate love, love hate, I think I'm gonna lose it
> Hate rappers, hate beats, hate trying to make peace
> With all you fake fucks but I got love for the music.
> Hate me? I hate you; I hate trying to break through
> I love being better but I hate having to prove it
> I hate when you motherfuckers hate on my tracks,
> But I'm fuelled by the hate, so it's time for the new shit.[49]

In articulating an 'us versus them' mentality, Stig constructs a protagonist to struggle against. It is unclear what he is battling against, which is reinforced in the endless list

[48] Taken from Stig of the Dump's website http://www.stigofthedumpuk.com/
[49] 'Hater' lyrics by Stig of the Dump from album *Mood Swings* (released 2010). For full lyrics see Stig's Bandcamp page: http://stigofthedumpuk.bandcamp.com/track/hater

of things Stig is affronted by – everything from hip hop itself, to race, 'fakes' and people disliking his music. Although this approach seems contradictory to other strategies/tactics that seek collectivism, affiliation and belonging it is arguable radical individualism is a response by rappers who do not quite fit the 'rules' and thus are concerned about exclusion. To counter this feeling of displacement or alienation, they respond with extreme individualism, emphasising their originality and resistance to conformity, trying to turn their otherness into a unique selling point. The strategy of radical individualism highlights the relational nature of authenticity in that rappers reflexively engage both with themselves and with/against 'others'.

6.8 Explicit Claims

One of the most common forms of asserting authenticity is through explicitly invoking it. Explicit claims of authenticity on the part of rappers can either be on stage when performing (for instance Micall Parknsun used the call and response of 'real' to which the audience replied 'shit' to declare he is the 'real shit'), as well as more subtly in lyrics, in everyday speech and now increasingly online. The most frequent and explicit espousal of authenticity is through the use of the words 'true' and 'real' in lyrics, song and album titles, and even emblazoned on clothes. The strategy of authenticity claims is ever more prevalent in digital media, with rappers using language associated with keeping it real, or demonstrating allegiance to a particular strand of hip hop or specific artists. Explicitly claiming authenticity provides a simple strategy for rappers to manage the tensions of being an authentic and unique rapper yet also identify as a member of the London hip hop scene. On the one hand it expresses individualism and can even take the tone of boasting, and on the other hand demonstrates commitment to the shared norms and values of hip hop. Rappers

experiencing the ongoing shifts of globalisation, capitalism and digitisation can be understood as 'disembedded' individuals with lingering desires for belonging and security (Bauman, 2001). In expressing authenticity claims in an explicit manner on stage, in media, and through lyrics, rappers forge a sense of individual identity yet demonstrate belonging to the group, which provides a sense of security in the continually changing landscape of modernity.

Explicit references to authenticity through the use of words such as 'real' and 'true' is ubiquitous in the scene. The titles of UK hip hop songs alone indicate the prevalence of this practice: 'Make it Real' (2013) by Efeks, 'True Intention' (2011) by Jehst, 'Real People' (2008) by Braintax, 'Real Rap' (2005) by Kyza Smirnoff, and Micall Parknsun's 'Dis iz Real' (2009). Instead of employing these common words, authenticity can be invoked in titles more subtly, such as the albums *Soundtrack to the Struggle* (2011) by Lowkey and *Speaking From Experience* (2008) by Blak Twang. In contrast to McLeod (1999) who argues that discursive invocations of authenticity in hip hop function to preserve the culture from assimilation into the mainstream, because the London scene is predominantly underground and does not enjoy commercial popularity, it is arguable that when these terms are cited it is to articulate individuality *and* belonging. Hodkinson's (2004) research on the goth community is helpful in understanding this strategy, particularly his term 'consistent distinctiveness'. He found participants preferred to talk about their individuality rather than the features they shared with their peers, but noted "internal differences usually took the form of creative, yet subtle variations and additions rather than the sort of diversity that would undermine group boundaries" (2004: 143). By being consistent, though slightly divergent, in demonstrating scene norms and values, rappers successfully negotiate the tension between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity. Rappers

are thus able to live out authenticity as distinct individuals in a community yet also adhere to tropes of hip hop. In this way, authenticity reconciles contradictions on an on-going everyday basis.

Claims of authenticity can be framed around telling the truth and somehow representing the reality of life. By 'speaking the truth', rappers manage their struggle by making it explicit through being open and talking about it. Examples of rappers 'speaking the truth' or extolling 'real talk' is prevalent on stage, online, but mostly evident in their lyrics. The chorus in 'Wisdom' (2013) by Brothers of the Stone advocate representing the truth:

> Stay wise
> Open your third eyes
> Deep in the mind is where the truth lies
> We build ties till our time comes to rise
> Stay focused, don't reach for the prize.

The lyrics (and the title) indicates that the rappers are preaching wisdom to their listeners, as though enlightened and speaking the truth themselves, they instruct us to listen to our inner selves. The phrase "don't reach for the prize" is warning us to resist seeking money or commercial gains, positioning the rappers as being underground and putting their art before mainstream success. In his song 'All 4 Hip Hop', Micall Parknsun takes a more direct route in explicitly suggesting that he *is* the truth, making him one in a million:

> So you better believe that
> I just won't stop,
> Bringing the real,
> In the booth I'm a do what I feel
> I'm the truth what's one in a mil

When I asked Micall in an interview about the heavy use of the word 'real' in his music, live shows, and media profiles, he responded,

> Hence the title[50], and every time I do a show, when I say 'real', you say 'shit'[51], cos that's what I'm about, I'm about the real shit. I'm about trying to talk about getting a mortgage, trying to show the reality of life for these kids man. For half of these kids they think, yeah if I rap, I'll get a deal and I'm blowing up. Nah, just be you.

Micall suggests that by talking about the 'reality of life', such as the struggles of being a father, paying bills and getting a mortgage, he is dispelling illusions of grandeur on the part of his 'kid' fans. The 'truth' that rappers appeal to paints a portrait of struggling young people in London. Shusterman (2000: 73) explains that "the realities and truths which hip hop reveals are not the transcendental eternal verities of traditional philosophy, but rather mutable but coercive facts and patterns of the material, sociohistorical world". Speaking the truth can be understood as "pulling the ideology of keeping it real back toward local definitions of what matters" (Pennycook, 2007: 103). By talking about what is going on around them or important to them, rappers reveal and reflect back the changes happening in society. In this way, authenticity can be understood as dynamic and relational in that it correspondingly changes with the 'facts' of the socio-historical and cultural society in which rappers are active agents.

6.9 (Social) Media Management

Not only do rappers strive to be authentic in person and on stage, now they have an additional level on which to negotiate authenticity, that of social media. The onset of

[50] The title of one of his songs is 'Dis iz real' (released in 2009)
[51] The call and response of "real" and "shit" referred to in the first paragraph of the section 'Explicit Claims' is performed by Micall Parknsun at gigs and is what he refers to here.

digitisation has had various repercussions on the UK hip hop scene as documented in Chapter 4, one of which has been the sharp uptake of artists using a variety of media platforms to build an online profile to promote themselves, distribute music, interact with fans, and perform authenticity. Rappers' use of social networking sites to articulate authenticity can vary though there are common trends. Demonstrating affiliation and allegiance to particular rappers, crews and record labels, explicit authenticity discourse such as 'real' and 'true', and espousing certain values and ideals are all ways in which rappers utilise media in attempting to live out authenticity. The strategy of media management can also incorporate other strategies/tactics such as explicit claims, oppositionist positioning, stratified integration and historical affiliation.

The communal space provided by online media allows for technologically communicated performances of identity or rapper personas that can be socially validated by scene participants, which is important because of the relational nature of authenticity. This can be seen most obviously in explicit claims using authenticity discourse associated with hip hop such as 'keepin' it real' and 'truth'. In the examples below taken from Facebook and Twitter, rappers use tropes of 'realness' to construct affiliation and belonging to each other and the scene:

[52]

[53]

[52] Twitter.com (accessed July 2012)

James Dike DEDICATE TO REALNESS AND YOU WILL SEE THE FUTURE!!
32 minutes ago · Like [54]

In the context of the London hip hop scene, a sense of belonging is important to rappers; demonstrating and reinforcing affiliation or allegiance to each other builds on what can be considered an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). Digital media facilitates declarations of belonging and the circulation of UK hip hop values, which can also allow for scene members to weed out inauthentic participants (Williams, 2004). This fits with a lot of research on popular music and media where instead of the internet allowing for democratic participation in various music and taste cultures, many scholars have found the reverse to be true. Far from encouraging exploration, movement and discovery, online networks encourage individuals to stick with existing affiliations (Hodkinson, 2002). The result is an intensification and enhancement of boundaries that separate social and cultural groupings. Baym argues that forums of various kinds "create unique normative standards and continually reinforce the norms by creating structural and social sanctions against those who abuse the groups 'systems of meaning'." (Baym, 1998: 60). The use of authenticity discourse online can be read as a normative standard within the scene, which is a strategy rappers engage in to perform authenticity. In the evolving and unfolding context of the scene, it is arguable rappers adopt this media management practice as it is a safe and secure means to negotiate their ongoing struggle, which in turn reinforces, but can also alter, authenticity.

In navigating the struggle of authenticity within the multiple roles of one's life from rapper and work identity to personal and family roles, the strategy of media

[53] Twitter.com (accessed August 2012)
[54] Facebook.com status (accessed July 2012)

management can be seen as a way in which rappers strive for integration across varying levels in their life. One way of doing this may be tweeting or updating Facebook with statements about one's everyday life, rather than specially cultivating a rapper identity. For instance, Micall Parknsun published online,

[55]

In posting about his mundane everyday existence, Micall Parknsun reveals how the combined activities of his day require the wearing of multiple hats, indicating the intricacy of day to day life and the challenge of negotiating authenticity in these multiple spheres. In referencing the various activities that make up the schedule of his day, Parknsun exemplifies stratified integration in the multiple roles of being a father, rapper, and human being with aches and pains. The management of media is a useful strategy when employed in this way to live out authenticity.

Sarah Thornton's (1995) notion of 'subcultural capital', the socially valued currency of subcultures, can be technologically communicated through the utilisation of personal websites as users can deploy pictures, text and videos to present a particular image of themselves as authentic. Social networking sites and personal websites can also be mobilised to assert knowledge and authority. For instance, demonstrating particular underground hip hop values or positioning oneself against people who sell out, therefore functioning as a central network for the movement and distribution, through social hierarchies, of social capital. Through these channels of communication, authenticity discourse is in operation. For example, rappers manage

[55] Facebook.com status (accessed October 2013)

the mainstream versus underground tension through publicly declaring themselves as underground as these two tweets illustrate:

[56]

> @GenesisElijah
> I've been in this industry over 10 yrs and have links with the most influential people in it so if I just wanted fame I could get it.[57]

These tweets suggest to fans that the rappers have the opportunity to make more money and be commercially successful but have chosen underground status over mainstream success. Through articulating their allegiance to the value of being underground rather than sell out to corporations, the rappers not only broadcast their principles and beliefs which they hold to be in line with authentic hip hop, they also distinguish themselves from other individuals and groups. Strategically using media management in this way can thus fulfil both an "internally integrative and externally differentiating" function for identity (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003).
Is there any evidence of it being a tactic for some (i.e. they use social media because they have to…but they don't or wouldn't choose to..i.e. out of weakness)?

In contrast, for rapper Dizraeli, using social media is considerably less strategic and something he 'has' to do. He stated in an interview,

> I have to spend quite a lot of time on Facebook doing videos and newsletters and Twitter and all that bollocks. It does eat my time in a way I resent but at the same time, without the internet as an artist, I probably wouldn't be making my living

[56] Twitter.com (accessed October 2013)
[57] Twitter.com (accessed July 2011)

> from doing what I do. We wouldn't have anything like the fan base that we have, however small it may be, if it weren't for the internet.

In this context, utilising social media is tactical in that it is coming from a place of weakness because Dizraeli would rather not spend so much time on the internet. In this situation we can see what Archer (2012) calls the 'reflexive imperative'. The imperative for humans to be reflexive in the developed world has been brought about by a new conjuncture between the cultural order and the structural order, shaping new situational contexts that subjects have to confront. Although torn in terms of having to do something he would prefer not to do, Dizraeli draws on his reflexive personal powers to choose a course of action that he thinks will ultimately benefit him, so as to rationalise his actions. Dizraeli resolves the conflict of using social media against his wishes reflexively. He is thus not 'inauthentic' in terms of doing something he would ordinarily choose not to do. This example illustrates how deploying strategies/tactics such as social media management is accomplished in the routine of rappers' everyday lives.

Although some of the examples of (social) media management appear contrived, it is important to note that the internet also allows for a degree of honesty and raw expression, though of course recognising performativity is still pervasive. Instead of online identities being fundamentally 'inauthentic' or 'false' as Baudrillard (1988) has argued, the internet according to Nancy Baym (2006), offers the freedom to be more open and honest than one would otherwise be. Furthermore, Wellman maintains that online life is not an isolated social phenomenon as "people bring to their online interactions such baggage as their gender, stage in the life cycle, cultural milieu, socioeconomic status, and offline connections with others" (2006: 42). Online identities, then, are not necessarily false but can be viewed as meaningful extensions

of one's offline life. Bauman (2004) makes the argument that by saying there are 'fake identities', implies there is such a thing as a one and only 'true identity', which is increasingly challenging in this 'liquid' late modernity as we have varying and diverse social, personal and professional roles in life. This does not mean that there was once a solid, bounded identity, as complex social and individual configurations have always existed, it is just that media have amplified the ways in which we communicate this complexity and facilitated an accelerated rate of ephemeral individual and social identities. Through computer-mediated technological advancements such as Facebook, Twitter, forums and personalised websites, hip hop artists can perform their authenticity across multiple platforms and reach other musicians or fans in a local context or on a global stage.

6.10 Conclusion

The conceptualisation of varying 'strategies' and 'tactics' builds on Peterson's (1997) 'authenticity work' and de Certeau's (1988) theorisation of 'everyday life'. I have described and explained how the work that goes into authenticity is dependent on and related to the changing societal context (digitisation, globalisation, capitalism, and migration). The strategies/tactics – stratified integration, oppositionist positioning, universal commonality, historical affiliation, radical individualism, explicit claims and (social) media management – explore not just what 'being' real entails in the London hip hop scene, but how rappers go about 'keeping' it real. These strategies/tactics are situated human practices shaping, changing and even transforming authenticity. Authenticity is thus a human quality and something active and dynamic that can be adapted to the differing contexts in which hip hop is taken up. Authenticity is then "not just a term applied in relation to our ideas, beliefs and so on, but is intimately

linked with what we actually do as embodied, contextualized, concretely singular individuals" (Wilson, 2013: 9), and how this changes over time. As such, authenticity can then be conceptualised as an emergent human capacity, (re)produced through situated practices, in a changing world.

Of the seven strategies/tactics delineated in this chapter, there were two that were predominant and more widely taken up compared to the others. These were stratified integration and media management. It is perhaps unsurprising that these two were the most prevalent bearing in mind the shifting societal context and its impact on contemporary everyday life as they are also arguably the most fundamental for those seeking authenticity. As modern life becomes more complex, we as human beings, not just rappers, have numerous personal, professional and social roles, which requires reconciling often competing positions and perspectives on a daily basis. To want to integrate these stratified levels is a natural inclination as otherwise we might feel alienated or 'inauthentic' because of wearing so many different hats that we can no longer be sure which one is 'really' us. Stratified integration can be strategic, for example in the case of Yungun described above, who actively chose to pursue law as a career and be a rapper as a hobby; or tactical, where seeking integration comes from a place of weakness in wanting stability and cohesion. Media management is perhaps the most ubiquitous strategy/tactic and the immediate go-to for rappers because media are such an embedded aspect of everyday life so can be deployed and utilised easily. The internet offers a communal space where performances of identity and authenticity claims can be socially validated (or rejected) instantaneously. The desire for belonging and acceptance can thus be quickly satisfied through successful social media management. The wide-ranging social-networking profiles, websites, blogs, apps, and so on, are not just essential tools of the modern day rapper, but increasingly

digital resources most young people draw on for work or personal purposes. As such, how youth utilise and mobilise them in their search and negotiation of authenticity is worthy of further exploration. These two strategies/tactics, along with the others, will be further discussed according to the wider social implications in the next and last chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion and Conclusion

> Authenticity is not so much to be found in the longed-for ideal, but in the everyday ebb and flow of life.
>
> Nick Wilson (2014: 211)

> I use a melody to preach and to show off my integrity
> Music is a release of energy
> Politics get shown up for all of its strategies
> By heartfelt lyrics that put the power in your batteries
> My music is an expression of myself
> I get stressed and lose my way
> But it definitely helps
>
> 'My Music' lyrics by BVA[58]

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to explain how authenticity is lived out by participants of a music culture that is adopted in a location different from its origins. Subject to the processes of globalisation (Condry, 2006), capitalism (Mitchell, 2002), global flows (Gilroy, 1993), appropriation (Androutsopolous & Scholz, 2003) and localisation (Bennett, 1999), hip hop "has affected nearly every place on the map" (Osumare, 2001: 171). As hip hop has become increasingly commodified and globalised, there has been heated debate, questioning whether practitioners, along with the cultural form itself, can still be considered authentic, especially at its various sites of appropriation. Some commentators view hip hop as the unique expression of the African-American experience (Perry, 2004) and all other forms to be inauthentic deviations (Bynoe, 2002), whilst others consider global hip hop manifestations as meaningful expressions of localised identity (Mitchell, 2001). The contested nature of authenticity in hip hop scholarship pointed to a need for an empirical study

[58] 'My Music' by group called 3 Amigos, lyrics from verse by BVA. Track from album *World War 3* (released 2011).

questioning why so many artists reference “keepin’ it real” and similar discourses and whether notions of authenticity are imported along with hip hop music or develop locally at the place of appropriation. Although global hip hop studies is a burgeoning area of scholarship, exploring localised hip hop all over the world, few studies have examined British hip hop. Furthermore, little empirical research has focused on London or authenticity specifically. Through the case study of London, my research sought to understand authenticity in a localised scene in the context of a globalised and capitalistic world.

To address the problematised literature concerning appropriated hip hop, the question guiding my research was: How do rappers ‘live out’ authenticity in the London hip hop scene?

What does this tell us about:

i) What authenticity is?
ii) The changing context of the London hip hop scene?
iii) The challenges facing young people in contemporary society as they seek to live out authenticity?

The research had two overarching aims. The first was to ascertain the nature of authenticity in a changing context. The second aim was to understand what authenticity in the London hip hop scene could tell us about the constraining and enabling conditions affecting young people more generally in contemporary society.

Having answered the first two questions in data analysis chapters, we can now turn to the third research question by relating the findings of the study to young people. To do this, I firstly revisit the main findings and restate my argument about the lived out nature of authenticity in the London hip hop scene. I then discuss the wider

implications of the study, which answers more fully the third part of the research question. After that, I highlight the key contributions of this thesis and suggest how my research has moved certain debates along. I conclude with some suggestions for future research.

7.2 Main findings

Struggle and uncertainty in a context of change

Life in contemporary London for rappers is characterised by struggle, brought about, in part, by macro-level processes that have wrought irrevocable changes on society. This has had repercussions on scene dynamics (participating and performance), music-making practices, and most fundamentally, how those involved integrate their music-making with the many demands of everyday life. The ongoing effects of migration, globalisation, marketisation and digitisation that I detailed in Chapter 4 make being a rapper in the London scene a challenging though clearly also exciting and artistically vibrant enterprise. The effects of migration have built up an increasingly cosmopolitan and diverse population in London, with migrants bringing distinct cultural and social influences from their native countries, creating a cultural melting pot of both hybridity and syncretism. There are now more ethnically diverse people participating in hip hop than when it first started in this country in the 1980s. Globalisation has the paradoxical impact of emphasising both the global *and* local through integrating international culture whilst drawing attention to the local (Featherstone, 1993). This can be seen most visibly in the development of localised scenes of hip hop outside the USA, creating a global 'hip hop nation'. The continuous movement of music, information and images of hip hop between the US and UK

creates an ongoing dialectic in that artists in the London scene have to decide between American formulations of rap or whether to build up their own localised frameworks of meaning. The capitalistic society we live in, characterised by consumerism and neoliberalism, has exploited hip hop to make it mass-marketable (Perry, 2004). The music industry has been irreversibly altered by digitisation, affecting how music is made, recorded, distributed, promoted and sold. Rappers are still adjusting to these changes and are required to alter their music-making practices as well as hone their online skills to keep up. In this context of change, it has become less clear-cut who, or indeed what, they are struggling against. This has made it profoundly difficult to 'keep it real'; which one might suggest places emphasis on authenticity, so that it grows in importance.

'Rapper authenticity' versus 'hip hop authenticity'

A key issue identified in the literature and brought out more strongly in my research is the distinction between what I term 'rapper authenticity' and 'hip hop authenticity', though they are closely intertwined. The tension refers to the nature of wanting both to assert individuality and also demonstrate belonging to a group or community. Hip hop authenticity is based on the genre as a community and its perceived 'rules' and conventions encompassing music-making practices, group style, behaviours, and attitudes; it also includes its historical legacy and notions of the 'old skool'. There is a pressure to "represent the community" (Williams, 2009) and perform according to subcultural codes. Hip hop has a strong historical self-consciousness which reinforces continuity and tradition within its culture (Williams, 2009) so it is potentially self-sabotaging to deviate from traditions too much. Rapper authenticity is based on individuality and originality and even rebelling to a certain degree. Such authenticity

is underpinned by notions of 'being true to oneself' and speaking the truth (Harkness, 2012). The tension between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity also captures the tension between what could be seen as US versus UK hip hop, or global versus local hip hop. On the one hand, there is pressure to adhere to certain principles of what it means to be authentic in hip hop, and on the other, one must also localise the music to make it an expression of oneself based on one's local context and understandings of the real (Pennycook, 2007).

The study reveals there is a dialectical relationship between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity. Dialectical critical realism overcomes the dualism between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity, by accounting for their coexistence. They are also inseparable in that hip hop is comprised of rappers making hip hop music. Rappers have to reconcile the challenges of producing hip hop according to particular tropes whilst also being an original and creative rapper. However, making and performing rap according to any 'rules' or principles appears diametrically opposed to authenticity and being true to oneself. The dilemma facing rappers is not to choose between rapper authenticity and hip hop authenticity but how to live with both of them on an ongoing daily basis.

Re-conceptualising Authenticity

The meta-theoretical perspective of critical realism allows an emergent understanding of authenticity, in contrast to other theories' conceptualisations of it as an essence or as fixed and unchanging in some way. Bhaskar (1978) argues that the past can have a conditioning influence on us, motivating, enabling but also constraining what we can do. Authenticity in hip hop has changed over time, depending on the musicians

involved, the geographic locale of production and performance, the reception and audience, the music industry, in addition to economic and structural conditions. The critical realist approach enquired beyond a discursive level, allowing me to not only describe the social reality of the actors in my study, but also, by identifying the situated practices agents engage in as they manage the conflicting roles, structures, resources, and norms that underpin everyday life, explain and critique them.

Based on empirical ethnographic data, my study reveals that in the case of the London hip hop scene, authenticity is an emergent human capacity (re)produced and managed through the negotiation of the myriad tensions and struggles that hip hop artists living in London encounter. Authenticity is then not just an abstraction related to ideas and beliefs, "but is intimately linked with what we actually do as embodied, contextualized, concretely singular individuals" (Wilson, 2013: 9). The study builds on Wilson by demonstrating how authenticity is dependent on, and related to, the changing societal context (globalisation, capitalism, migration and digitisation) as played out in the particular context of hip hop in London. As the world is stratified and emergent (Bhaskar, 1978), it is always changing, challenging a static conception of authenticity that is somehow bound to a particular formulation or following of outdated 'rules'. Hip hop itself is also evolving, diffusing across the globe and being appropriated by diverse people in wide-ranging contexts; so it follows that authenticity is an ongoing process generated by human agents and the social, cultural and political conditions of the time. Significantly, my empirical study shows what the conceptualisation of authenticity as an emergent human capacity, (re)produced through situated practices in a changing world means *in practice*. It is through the ways in which we negotiate the inherent struggles and contradictions of life that authenticity is revealed.

'Strategies' and 'Tactics'

Managing struggles in modern day society whilst simultaneously seeking to live out authenticity, has led rappers to develop various approaches in response. I call these approaches 'strategies' and 'tactics', drawing on the research of Peterson (1997) and his theory of 'authenticity work' and de Certeau (1988) on 'everyday life'. The strategies/tactics are the ways in which rappers actively manage the tension between constraint and freedom, and suggest the effort required to maintain authenticity. The strategies/tactics have evolved reflexively through interaction among interdependent participants including artists, audiences and the industry, and also complex interplay with structural factors. They are thus subject to change and develop over time. The strategies/tactics arguably developed in a mostly improvised and subconscious manner, although have come to be more conscious and deliberate for some rappers. For instance, one rapper revealed to me that he felt almost "schizophrenic" because of the various jobs and roles he had in life so actively sought to stop one or achieve some sort of equilibrium across them all. It is examples such as these I interpreted as a strategy/tactic, which I then labelled 'stratified integration'. We all now operate on various levels in everyday life, constantly trying to reconcile our personal life with our professional life, and now our mediated identity online and, for performers like rappers, their stage life. 'Stratified integration' seeks to reconcile these apparently irreconcilable strands, for instance, by a rapper attempting to make hip hop their full time job rather than a hobby.

It is a common strategy for rappers to position themselves in opposition to the 'inauthentic'. Although many rappers cited particular sub-genres of hip hop (e.g.

gangsta or the mainstream), it was quite difficult to pinpoint exactly who or what they opposed, suggesting that what they struggle against could be both real and imaginary. In this context, rappers assert their authenticity against the 'inauthentic' and in so doing create new divisions and protagonists to give them something to struggle against. The strategy of universal commonality acts to dispel any notion of difference in order to suggest we are all the same, which builds a stronger sense of community and acceptance in the scene. The approach challenges and contests notions of class and race as being fixed signifiers of authenticity. Historical affiliation is a strategy that allows rappers to authenticate themselves through identification with previous hip hop eras or artists, functioning to create a lineage they are part of, and also link them to the hip hop nation.

Radical individualism sees rappers positioning themselves against the world, creating a 'me and them' mentality. In addition, rappers assert their uniqueness and originality through the articulation of rebellious values, wanting to stand out, and by equating authenticity with what they like. Although this approach seems contradictory to other strategies that seek affiliation and belonging, it is arguable radical individualism is a response by rappers who do not quite fit the 'rules' and feel as if they do not belong. To counter this feeling of displacement or alienation, they respond with extreme individualism, emphasising their originality and resistance to conformity in a bid to turn it into a positive attribute.

The use of explicit claims builds on Peterson's (2005) 'authenticity work' more directly in that rappers arguably make discursive claims, which are either accepted or rejected by others. Media management, which can combine other strategies/tactics, is concerned with how rappers reconcile their diverse online profiles and the ways in

which they utilise them. The most common use of digital media is to demonstrate affiliation and belonging with others, and espousal of scene values and ideology which can be interpreted as a safe way of identifying with the hip hop community, yet also carves out a degree of individual expression at the same time.

The seven strategic and tactical responses to authenticity have the potential to tell us about contemporary society and the role of hip hop culture in reflecting back to us its changes. In the section below on the 'wider implications' of the study, I suggest that these strategies/tactics can provide insights beyond the context of the London hip hop scene as the struggles experienced are not limited to rappers, but arguably felt by many young people in London. We therefore potentially have much to learn from how rappers have gone about trying to reconcile tensions that arise on a regular basis.

Strategies and tactics are deemed successful depending on whether the rapper is seen to be negotiating authenticity well or not. This raises an important consideration about the way in which authenticity is judged. The study has focused on how rappers live out authenticity, grounding the empirical data on the micro practices of participants in the London hip hop scene and so basing the findings on the agency and actions of rappers. Ultimately, though, authenticity is important because of its value as a socially recognised capacity. Therefore, a key aspect of authenticity is what Peterson (2005) calls 'authentication', whereby a person is judged to be authentic or inauthentic by others. In the case of the London hip hop scene, these 'others' might be people who make up the rest of the scene such as DJs, fans, producers and promoters, and may also include industry personnel such as record label executives, managers, booking agents, journalists, and critics. Following Peterson, no one person or group (e.g.

rapper, 'expert' or mass of fans) authenticates hip hop. Rather, "there is a cycle of authentication involving everyone active in the field" (p.1091).

7.3 Wider implications of the study

Despite academic scholarship emphasising socially constructed models of authenticity that underscore fakeness (Gilmore & Pine, 2007), as a concept it is highly pervasive and very much a concern of modern life. In Western contemporary society, authenticity dominates the social and cultural landscape, as suggested in declarations of 'authentic' cuisine and organic produce, to tourism, reality television programmes and music. The predominance of popular books published on the topic further point to an emphasis on authenticity in Western society. Authenticity is increasingly mobilised to sell us commodities as indicated by Gilmore & Pine's (2007) *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, while Potter warns us not to fall victim to authenticity branding in *The Authenticity Hoax* (Potter, 2011). *The Power of Authenticity to Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Robbins, 2009) and *Something More: Excavating Your Authentic Self* (Breathnach, 2009) provide self-help guidance on how to live a more authentic life. The ongoing processes mapped out in Chapter 4 are contributory factors in heightening concerns with authenticity; namely notable themes of individualism, instability and insecurity leading to increased alienation, thus hold profound implications for forms of sociality (Gill, 2008). As Gilbert (2010) notes, lack of community "is the most obvious failing of competitive market society", driving people to seek belonging and security. In the face of a growing consumerist and materialistic culture, the continuous flux of global flows, and mediated reality, a sense of *in*authenticity pervades, which potentially explains why authenticity has grown in significance and meaning to people. As such, the UK hip hop scene arguably

represents society not overall, but in some respects, in that its members try to make sense of a confusing and changing world whilst simultaneously trying to live out keeping it real. Negotiating authenticity can then be seen as a universal concern.

In this section I turn to the third part of the research question to explore the potential implications of the study for young people in contemporary society. Although it is of course difficult to generalise among such a heterogeneous group as 'young people', it is still helpful and worthwhile to think through how the strategies/tactics can be usefully applied to other groups beyond the London hip hop scene. While seldom labelled as such, 'authenticity' is a widespread preoccupation of young people as it lies at the roots of group membership, collective identity and values, personal and social identity formation and maintenance, and also status (Vannini & Williams, 2009).

Authenticity is 'relational' in that it cannot be understood without taking into account social contexts. As Pennycook (2007: 105) has argued, authenticity is not an individualist obsession with the self but a dialogical engagement with community. Authenticity, then, demands an account of matters beyond the self as we are connected to a wider whole. The strategies and tactics emerge through the complex lived experience of everyday life, in that culture and social relationships make up the fabric of our existence; we are not dislocated from them. Because the strategies/tactics are grounded in the everyday, they are also in motion, as they are based on the complex constellations of constraint and enablement that young people are subject to. The tensions experienced of trying to earn a living from one's art form, or juggling different roles and responsibilities in professional and private spheres, or raising enough capital in the first place to even start being creative, are not limited to rappers.

Nor are they limited to 'artists' or creative people. All young people have to work with freedom and constraint to some degree. It is in their overarching capacity to manage these tensions that we see authenticity.

Recent news articles further reinforce the notion that the sense of struggle experienced by rappers depicted in this thesis is shared by the 'younger generation' more generally. Articles such as 'Bad luck, not policy, is the scourge of the young' (Financial Times, January 2014) and 'Have young people never had it so bad?' (BBC, February 2013), in addition to the Radio 4 programme 'The "Never Had It" Generation' (BBC, January 2014), highlight the challenges facing young people compared to their baby boomer parents. High unemployment, expensive education, and a lifetime of renting, place young people at a distinct disadvantage and in a situation rife with complicated challenges and tough decisions to make. As Archer's book *The Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity* (2012) argues, reflexivity is increasingly important in today's world of uncertainty – not least because we cannot rely on old certainties. In the challenging contexts that youth find themselves in, and in the absence of social guidelines indicating what to do, young people have to reflexively define their own course(s) of action. The tactics/strategies presented in this thesis articulate the common reflexive approaches undertaken by rappers to deal with their circumstances whilst striving to live out authenticity and so could prove illuminating when applied to young people more generally.

The theme around 'rapper authenticity' versus 'hip hop authenticity' can be reformulated as personal versus social, or self versus collective. Framed in this more general way, we can see this tension in most spheres of young people's lives where they have to negotiate rules or conventions imposed by a particular group of people or

institution. To give examples, a young person's individual sense of self might be challenged by schools or universities regulating their behaviour; the place they work has an expected code of conduct; and the church, temple and mosque has particular rules and conventions. Additionally, in home life, families can have various expectations at odds with young people's own interests and motivations. This is in addition to negotiating an individual identity on a local level, within a national context, against a backdrop of globalisation. It is perhaps unsurprising then that modern life seems underpinned by a sense of conflict and uncertainty in wanting to belong and craving connectedness, whilst also seeking a 'true' self and individuality.

The strategy/tactic of universal commonality is driven by a human desire for connectedness and unity. Thus it can be deployed to transcend barriers between class, age, ethnicity, sexuality and geography. For example, women could challenge heteronormative ideologies of gender and sexuality in masculine spaces and vice versa, justifying their participation through universal commonality or the stategy/tactic of radical individualism. Radical individualism is a form of contesting rules or reflexively engaging with or against others. It can be mobilised in various social or professional settings as a response to people policing boundaries. It can also be deployed in such a way to make oneself original and individual, therefore perhaps more desirable to others, or more employable, or stand out against those conforming. Furthermore, as depicted in Chapter 6, Dizraeli utilised the strategy/tactic to turn potentially negative attributes (being white and middle-class) into positive ones.

As specific forms of knowledge and interest can govern membership to various groups and clubs (Moehn, 2013), the strategy/tactic of historical affiliation can be adopted to negotiate authenticity. Invoking the past in some capacity or having

historical knowledge would be an advantage in numerous other music subcultures such as jazz and punk, as well as various hobbies, including sport and football. The strategy of explicit claims is a way of loudly and overtly demonstrating allegiance or belonging. For example, in varying youth cultures, there are dominant forms of slang and language that can display membership to a group and also help members to identify each other. Furthermore, explicit claims can be broadened to not only include verbal discourse but other facets of identity and belonging such as fashion. Oppositionist positioning operates through validating oneself by singling out other people or groups to differentiate oneself from. The strategy/tactic could be used reflexively against those with a different political view or people whose values you disagree with. Or, as Stig used the approach (described in Chapter 6), it can be more tactical in terms of feeling different and can thus position young people as outsiders, or can function as intentional self-exclusion, making oneself unique and individual. Stratified integration ultimately seeks to attain a unified identity. This is understandably desirable and the most widespread strategy/tactic, as mentioned in the previous chapter, because people are not only managing conflicting roles but also seeking stability in an ever-fluctuating maelstrom of fleeting trends, expectations and information.

Media management is perhaps the most complex of all the authenticity practices as it is highly flexible and can also incorporate many, if not all, the other strategies/tactics. It is also arguably the easiest to deploy as most young people are globally mobile and internet-connected. However, it raises a plethora of questions concerning authenticity in one's virtual life. For example, is one's online life an extension to the offline world, or are exaggerated personas more prevalent? Are authenticity practices similar or different according to varying online platforms? Is authenticity more or less of an

issue when there is no 'physical' presence? These types of questions call for further research concerning authenticity online and also the tactical/strategic nature of media practices. The internet readily offers a public space to assert belonging yet individuality. Through a wide array of digital tools and resources, such as text, pictures, videos, links, and emoticons, people can present a particular image of themselves, which importantly, is editable. Various websites now have inbuilt functions that allow others to 'like' or give feedback, all instantaneously. Social networking sites thus feed our need to feel connected in an increasingly disconnected world. However, this 'connectivity' is often illusory and can result in further alienation, which highlights a further negative side to digitisation.

The strategies/tactics are concretely situated which means they shift according to the changing societal context. They are therefore reflexive responses to a particular temporal and spatial moment, but are likely to occur at other places because of similar social, economic, political and cultural conditions brought about by modernity. So while London is unique on the one hand, on the other hand it shares similar traits such as diversity and social mobility with other large cities. Humans are always in states of being and becoming. This means we are changing society as much as society is changing us in that we reproduce and transform ourselves (i.e. through strategies and tactics) everyday. Situated practices are then important as they are the means through which we either reinforce existing structures, power dynamics, and economic conditions, or challenge, contest, subvert and change them. For example, hip hop's contestation of race as a signifier of authenticity makes it a key site for social transformation (Fraley, 2009: 49). By asking crucial questions about authentic racial identities, hip hop practitioners challenge the tendency to reduce racial politics to the level of stable and essentialised individuals (Rodman, 2006: 107). As Stokes (1994: 4)

has commented, "music does not…simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed." As such, authenticity strategies/tactics are not just forms of 'symbolic' resistance as subcultural theorists (Hebdige, 1979; Bennett, 2001) would view them, but hold the potential for 'real' resistance against ideologies, social structures and the state.

The fixation on speaking the truth means rappers "disturb the peace" (Smitherman, 1997: 5) by telling us about the "facts and patterns of the material, sociohistorical world" (Shusterman, 2000: 73). As Pennycook argues, speaking the truth can be understood as "pulling the ideology of keeping it real back toward local definitions of what matters" (2007: 103). By talking about what is going on around them or what is important to them, rappers reveal and reflect the changes happening in society, which can in turn help us understand the salience of authenticity and also its emergent nature as produced through human practices. Defining individual or local matters of significance paradoxically connects us to the wider whole because we cannot understand it without taking into account the social context. In his discussion of hip hop in Brazil, Pardue (2004: 412) suggests artists "view themselves as social agents who force the Brazilian public to be more inclusive about what constitutes knowledge and legitimate perspectives on reality". If we apply this to the London hip hop scene, rappers are telling us what is real to them and what matters. This has important implications. For instance, rappers' lyrics can serve as a cultural barometer of the pressing contemporary social and cultural issues facing many young people today.

Indeed, what are rappers' lyrics telling us about society and the world? Although lyrics were not the focus of the study, based on my research and attending shows where I heard countless songs, watched numerous YouTube videos, listened to

various songs online, as well as scoured the internet for UK hip hop lyrics, there are conspicuous key themes. The topics I have discussed in my thesis speak to these reoccurring themes, but there are perhaps other notable areas of interest. Although of course a rigorous content analysis of hip hop lyrics would provide a more thorough examination of common themes and tropes, my investigation discovered subject matter were commonly around the espousal of particular values, a profound sense of struggle, a search for truth, and the notion that rap is an art, requiring craft and commitment. The values rappers were extolling were anti-consumerist and anti-materialist in nature, which is in stark contrast to gangsta rappers' penchant for 'bling' and money (Guy, 2004). This again could help to explain the emphasis on being 'underground' as rappers actively resist commercial and corporate industry infrastructures. Lyrics often explore self identity through reflexively talking about one's life and background, for instance Akala starting the song 'Find No Enemy' (2010) with the lines, "Apparently I'm second generation black Caribbean and half white Scottish whatever that means/ See lately I've been confused with the boxes, cos to me all they do is breed conflict"[59]. The lyrical and dynamic format of rap allows for the experimentation and expression of social identity formation and disputation. Respect is vital to rappers, which is why adherence to certain rules is widespread as people are seeking acceptance. It is clear that a motivation for making hip hop beyond self expression is a real desire for one's voice to be heard, and crucially, taken seriously. Rappers view hip hop as an art, not merely a street culture as it requires skill, practice, hard graft, and development of one's craft like any other musician. Hip hop lyrics can inform us of what is going on in society and reflects the changes, whilst revealing what matters to young people.

[59] 'Find No Enemy' Lyrics by Akala from the album *Doublethink* (released 2010). http://rapgenius.com/Akala-find-no-enemy-lyrics

In a world where formal institutions such as the church, government and school and their attendant traditions are in decline, leading to a loss of community in a fragmented world (Beck, 2000), many people are seeking alternative sources of meaning and purpose. In modern society fears and uncertainty are becoming more diffuse and harder to pin down. It is arguable that art helps to fill this vacuum through "making us feel less alone, rebalancing our characters, helping us to appreciate our circumstances and encouraging us in our search for meaning and connection" (de Botton, 2013). For rappers, hip hop is an expressive art form that offers meaning and belonging in the complicated and alienating 21st century Western world. Writing and recording music presents a way for rappers to make a stand against their struggle, however small. As Krims (2000) commented, rap music can be 'resistant' in terms of carving out spaces of freedom and pleasure, rather than offer revolutionary political force. The art of rapping is an outlet that can convey the vast array of human experience in contemporary London including both social commentary and humorous reflections. The process of making music is often collaborative and thus community building, explaining the emphasis placed on belonging and acceptance in the London hip hop scene. The track 'My Music' by the 3 Amigos has a verse by rapper BVA that indicates the power of music in young people's lives:

> Without this music art
> I think I might just fall apart
> This life is getting hard
> I know I'll make it if I just find the spark
> I get myself all depressed and down
> When the music makes the people gather round
> I'm just searching for a sound
> But I've already found my self-unity
> And an openness in my mind for things new to me
> I used to dream of munity
> Raw breaks and bass lines
> Listening to tracks and getting high on my break times

I use a melody to preach and to show off my integrity
Music is a release of energy
Politics get shown up for all of its strategies
By heartfelt lyrics that put the power in your batteries
My music is an expression of myself
I get stressed and lose my way
But it definitely helps
All the meanings that I've felt
All slipped under my belt
Sometimes it seems I care about this more than my own health.[60]

This extract reveals how important rap is to BVA, as without it he "might just fall apart". He references a sense of struggle and uncertainty when talking about life being hard and then goes on to express how hip hop alleviates this through opening up new opportunities, the ability to demonstrate integrity, and above all the capacity to express himself. Hip hop as an art form, then, can be understood as empowering young people by providing a vehicle to not only question and critique our world but also inform and enrich it, with potential transformative and restorative effects on society.

7.4 Contribution to knowledge

My thesis makes a contribution to the field on a theoretical, methodological and empirical basis. Firstly, basing the study on a critical realist meta-theoretical foundation enabled the investigation of authenticity in hip hop to move beyond a discursive and linguistic level to one that could account for the lived out and everyday nature of keeping it real. By neither conceptualising authenticity as essentialist (Taylor, 1997) nor wholly socially constructed (Moore, 2002), this intervention makes an important and necessary contribution on a theoretical level. Existing theory posits authenticity as more or less a conscious strategy, involving claims and work (Peterson,

[60] 'My Music' by 3 Amigos, verse by BVA from album *World War 3* (released 2010). http://www.hiphopinenglish.com/lyrics/3-amigos-my-music/

1997) that is contrived and 'fabricated' in some way to gain legitimacy or competitive advantage in a group. Instead of viewing authenticity as a fixed set of norms and standards by which people are judged (Grazian, 2003; McLeod, 1999; Thornton, 1996), a 'series of responses to the "black" characteristics of the hip hop style' (Bennett, 2004: 189), a set of linguistic devices (Smitherman, 1997), or a notion of truth to oneself (Maxwell, 2003), authenticity is situational – what is considered authentic under one set of conditions is not considered authentic under others (Harkness, 2012). The argument put forward has articulated that authenticity in hip hop is not based on one thing or another, specifically in relation to race or class (McLeod, 1999), nor is it solely a form of capital (Thornton, 1995) or strategically contrived (though this is a constitutive part of it). Rather, it is negotiated at an individual level (consciously and unconsciously) and produced through situated practices (strategies and tactics) that are dependent on the context. In short there are a number of variables that influence the negotiation of authenticity, not simply race, class or skill level (Harkness, 2012).

However, this does not mean authenticity is relativistic in that it is relative to each individual because the wider trend of authenticity being emergent indicates everyone in the scene has to manage the various tensions posed by everyday life in contemporary and neoliberal London. In casting authenticity as not fixed or constructed but negotiated, the discussion moves beyond binary debates of authenticity being either essentialist or constructed (Grossberg, 1996). Furthermore, by drawing out the emergent, dialectical and relational nature of authenticity, I have argued that authenticity needs to be considered in terms of social context because we cannot define it without connecting it to the wider whole. Authenticity can then be

understood as reflexive in terms of negotiating relations with the self, as well as with/against others, located with the larger context of late modernity.

In employing ethnography as the primary research design, the study has been able to contribute to empirical research on localised understandings of authenticity in appropriated music cultures. This has involved the production of original data collected through fieldwork and interviews. Although authenticity is an area of concern in both popular music and hip hop, less is known about the way(s) in which authenticity impinges on the everyday lives of cultural producers. In combining ethnography and the meta-theoretical perspective of critical realism, the study takes into account the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of participants rather than purely discursive claims to authenticity (Peterson, 1997), thus incorporating what people do as well as say. My study shows how work that goes into managing authenticity relates to the changing societal context (migration, capitalism, digitisation, and globalisation), which is more nuanced, in depth and builds on Peterson's (1997) work.

Thirdly, I contribute empirically grounded research on the London hip hop scene that has hitherto never been studied. This fills a gap in the growing canon of global hip hop studies that focuses on hip hop outside the USA. By using London as a case study, the findings speak to crucial issues surrounding processes of cultural assimilation, appropriation and diffusion, and the "rigidity and malleability of social identities within multicultural globalised contexts" (Harrison, 2008: 1785). In addition, based on the data generated, the study challenges the moral panics generated by newspaper headlines such as those cited in the introduction ('London riots: is rap music to blame for encouraging this culture of violence?' and 'Gangsta culture is a poison spreading among youths of all races'), by indicating 'gangsters' and 'violence' do not underpin

rap culture in the London scene, nor they constitute 'keepin it real' and authentic hip hop for young rappers.

By demystifying the complex social meanings attributed to 'keeping it real' by hip hop practitioners; the research underscores just how important authenticity is in the lives of rappers. In shifting the academic focus to the everyday, the study brings abstracts notions of authenticity to the level of the embodied, experienced and practised. As such, the strategies/tactics tell us not just what authenticity *is*, but *how* is it is lived out, based on empirical evidence. Through revealing the negotiated nature of authenticity in an everyday context, the study sheds light on the enabling and constraining conditions affecting young people in contemporary society. Contrary to Templeton's (2005) assertion that hip hop and its resistance capacity have been completely commodified, this study reveals that rapping creates a pocket of creativity and empowerment in an otherwise alienating and confusing world.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

There are, of course, many related topics which remain unexplored, and which hold potential for future research – as hip hop studies is still a relatively untapped field in this country. In terms of place, the research raises several questions about space and geography of hip hop cultural practices. London is a large metropolis with varying populations and sites of creative and cultural production. My study looked at a pocket of established and underground hip hop in London; there are undoubtedly other potential avenues to explore hip hop such as where underage youth practice and perform rap, or rap scenes on housing estates - 'the ends' - that I did not have access to. Linked to this is perhaps the shift in cultural taste of black working-class youth to

grime music, which may be considered the new creative and underground expression of London based youth (Bramwell, 2011). Building on de Certeau's conceptualisation of 'tactics' and 'strategies' in relation to space and place could also prove productive in further understanding 'localised' hip hop, and also hold potential in examining the music itself. Additionally, it would be interesting to uncover if my case study is indicative of the whole of the UK or whether London is indeed very particular in being so culturally and ethnically diverse that the findings are not readily generalisable. Further research in other locations across Britain could build on and supplement my study and potentially consolidate my findings.

It was not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the issue of gender in any detail, as that could comprise a whole PhD in itself, but the topic promises various productive lines of enquiry for future research. Studies on hip hop that focus on gender, particularly women, lacks empirical case studies. The topic is slowly receiving scholarly attention but is predominantly American in focus (Morgan, 2000; Pough, 2007; Love, 2012; Brown & Kwakye, 2012), though this offers potential for illuminating comparisons with global hip hop. As my interviewee sample indicated, female artists are significantly underrepresented in UK hip hop so research investigating this gender imbalance would be worthwhile and interesting. The relationship between gender and authenticity is particularly unexplored.

A further study specifically focusing on age would be another fascinating area to explore. Although my research included a degree of longitudinal data with respondents reflecting on their own careers, a more focused long-term investigation that looked at where rappers are in ten years time and how authenticity practices have changed over time would present intriguing findings. As participation in rap continues

in a 'post-youth' context, there is ever more reason to question the 'youth culture' category of hip hop (Hodkinson, 2012). Older rappers in the scene raise the question of whether continued participation is a simple extension of youth or if like Hodkinson's (2011) research on goths, material, domestic and physical elements of developing adult lives are reconciled. Additionally, the London hip hop scene is currently multi-generational but as older rappers age even more, it will be interesting to see if the scene remains unified or fragments. This thread of research would fit into the growing area of ageing in popular music.[61]

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter brings the study of how rappers 'keep it real' in the London hip hop scene to a close. The chapter has reviewed the findings of the thesis in light of the research questions and also discussed its implications and contributions as well as potential avenues for future research. Through the investigation of rappers in the London hip hop scene, this thesis posits that living out authenticity requires negotiating both freedom and constraint. This is arguably what we all have to work with to some degree. The key, then, to being authentic in music, as in life, is "to learn to live with discipline yet with passion, with freedom yet with order" (Barenboim, 2008: 20). In this sense, we have much to learn from rappers.

[61] For instance, see Hodkinson & Bennett's *Ageing and Youth Cultures* (2012) and Bennett & Taylor (2012)

APPENDIX A

Glossary of Hip Hop Terms

Backpacker – slang term for nerdy rappers or can be even used to categorise a type of hip hop where rappers use complex rhyme schemes, large syllable words and tend to have politically inflected lyrics.

Beatboxing – is a form of vocal percussion. Beatboxers create drum beats and musical sounds using their voice, lips and tongue.

Beats – the musical (usually electronic) accompaniment to rapping.

Biting – term used to describe inauthentic actions of rappers and DJs. It is essentially plagiarising, ripping off another person's style, moves or intellectual material and results in a great loss of respect from other hip hoppers.

Boom Bap – a style of hip hop music signified by a hard bass drum and snapping snare and usually refers to 'old skool' tracks.

Breaks or breakbeat – sample of a syncopated drum beat usually lifted as an excerpt from a record.

Crew – an assemblage of people in a rap group.

Cypher – rap equivalent of a 'jamming session' in which an informal gathering of rappers take it in turns to rap. It can either be a cappella, accompanied to music or with a beatboxer. Lyrics can either be freestyled or pre-written verses.

Dubstep – form of electronic dance music that originated in South London in the late 1990s. It is characterised by heavy bass lines and sub-bass frequencies.

Drum 'n' Bass – type of electronic music that emerged in the UK during the 1990s. The genre has 160-180 beats per minute and heavy bass lines.

Flow - refers to the rhythm of the rhyme and how closely rappers keep in time to the music, as well their intonation.

Freestyle – rapping spontaneous and unwritten lyrics.

Gangsta – a type of rapper who is usually distinguishable by their clothes and style. They typically wear 'bling' (gaudy jewellery) and generally produce lyrics espousing violence, machismo and misogyny.

Garage – genre of electronic music based on Chicago house music but developed in the UK in early 1990s. It comprises of a syncopated rhythm and features MCs rapping. It has now largely been subsumed into other UK genres such as dubstep, grime and drum 'n' bass.

Grime – is essentially a cross between hip hop and speed garage and developed in East London during the 2000s. It is characterised by a fast tempo of 140 beats per minute and features MCs rapping.

Hip Hop – is a cultural phenomenon made up of four distinct elements – rapping, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti. In terms of music, it comprises the rapping and DJ components.

Hip Hop Head – someone who identifies as being a hip hop fan. This includes artists, DJs and other stakeholders.

Hip Hop Nation – collective term for the global hip hop community, encompassing all the local scenes in countries across the world.

Jungle – genre of music that gained popularity in Britain during the 1990s. It is characterised by chopped up electronic breaks and heavy basslines and sometimes features ragga vocals. It is often considered the pre-cursor to drum 'n' bass.

MC/emcee – alternative terms for 'rapper'.[62] MC is an abbreviation of 'Master of Ceremonies', though some people now say it stands for 'mic controller' (the one with the microphone).

Old Skool – contested term but in general refers to hip hop made between the period of the 1970s to 1980s.

Open Mic – public event in which music and a mic (microphone) are provided for any artists to perform in front of others.

Rap Battle - a competition usually between two rappers who fight against each other using lyrics.

Rapper – a person who expresses himself through rhythmic spoken word lyrics.

Rapping – a form of vocal delivery in which rhyming lyrics are spoken or 'rapped' in time with a continuous back beat.

Rhyme Schemes – the pattern of the rhyme between the lines of a song (the same as poetry).

Trip Hop – is a subgenre of hip hop that emerged from Bristol in the early 1990s. The genre experiments with breakbeats and fuses other musical influences to create ambient and electronic sounding hip hop.

Wordplay – how a rapper creatively uses lyrics within a song. For example, incorporating words with double meanings and puns for humour or including punch lines.

[62] In grime and jungle music the terms are not used interchangeably as in hip hop, only 'MC' is used.

APPENDIX B

List of Interviewees

Name	Date Interviewed	Male/ Female
Simon	13/2/2012	M
Johnny (x 2)	29/2/2012	M
Stig of the Dump	9/7/2012	M
Monsieur Frites	10/7/2012	M
Trice	11/7/2012	M
Edward Scissortongue	25/7/2012	M
Dekay	26/7/2012	F
Jester Jacobs (x 2)	21/8/2012	M
Benny Diction	29/8/2012	M
Chester P	30/8/2012	M
Solo Cypher	3/9/2012	M
Micall Parknsun	4/9/2012	M
Yungun	6/9/2012	M
Efeks	6/9/2012	M
Consensus	7/9/2012	M
Leen	12/9/2012	M
Dizraeli	14/9/2012	M
Jam Baxter	26/9/2012	M
Potent Whisper	5/10/2012	M

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Identity and Authenticity in a London Hip Hop Scene

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP-H/10/11-12

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

	Please tick or initial
• I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researcher involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the point of publication in November 2012.	☐
• I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be handled in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.	☐
• I consent to my interview being recorded.	☐
• The information you have submitted will be published as a report and if you wish, you can be sent an electronic copy. Please note that if you have requested confidentiality, anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications.	☐

Participant's Statement:

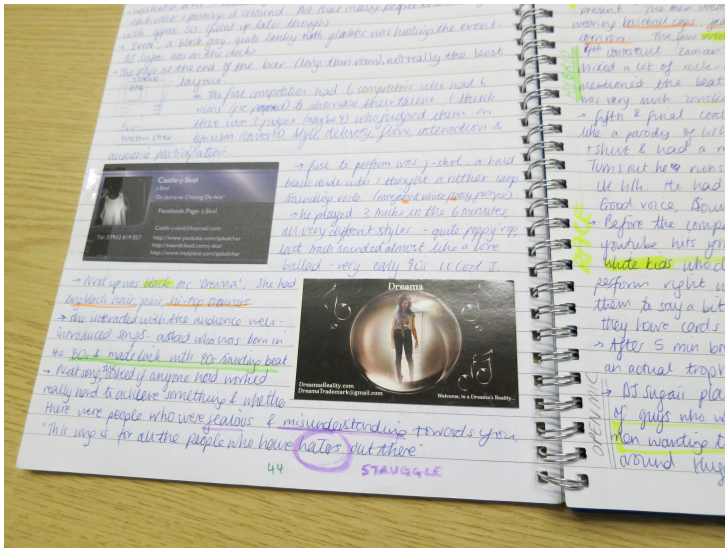
I _____

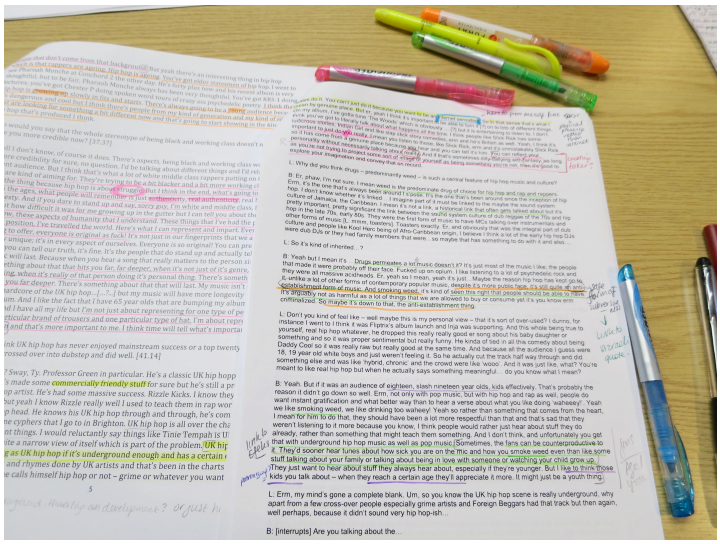
agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

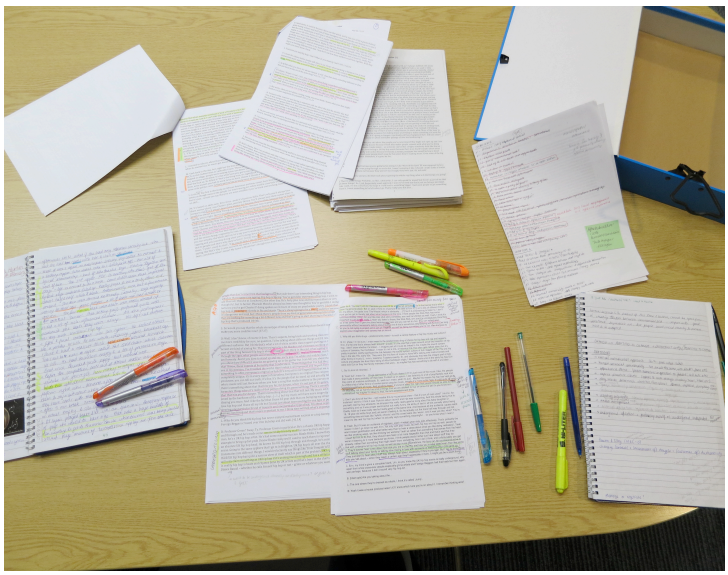
Signed **Date**

APPENDIX D

Photographs of Manual Data Analysis







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